



# INDEPENDENT PRODUCERS

## A Guide to 21<sup>st</sup> Century Independent Music Promotion and Distribution

**Tomas Alfredo Valladares | Spring 2011**

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University of Oregon in partial fulfillment of the requirements for  
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**APPROVED:**



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**Eugene, OR**  
June 2011

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**Bachelor of Science in Marketing**  
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**Université Marc Bloch**  
**I.I.E.F. (Institut International d'Etudes Françaises)**  
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## EXPERIENCE:

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**ChinaVine.org**  
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**May 2007 - Present**  
Orlando, FL / Eugene, OR

- Coordinating interdisciplinary teams of students and faculty on an international digital research project
- Documenting and preserving traditional Chinese folk-culture in rural China
- Leading Digital Media/Web Development, Film, and Research teams
- Producing and wrangling media content for posting on interactive project website
- Traveled to China as part of a student filmmaking team

**Cinema Pacific film festival**  
*Adrenaline Film Project Coordinator*

**January 2010 – Present**  
Eugene, OR

- Coordinated and organized 72 hour student film contest
- Created, designed, and managed festival blog site
- Created and implemented project strategic plan
- Coordinated and implemented marketing and promotional plans
- Arranged venues and services for project events

**GuideOne Mobile**  
*Content Development Intern*

**June 2010 – Aug 2010**  
Brooklyn, NY

- User Interface and Content Management System testing
- Organized and demoed walking tour content and navigation
- Wrote and edited videos and audio guide content

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### **Center for Community Arts and Cultural Policy**

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Eugene, OR

- Assist faculty in researching and implementing various research projects including student ePortfolios and Chinese intangible culture.
  - Create graphic design materials and collateral for new academic program launches
- Manage and update various blogs and websites

### **Wright Entertainment Group**

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**Aug 2008 - Dec 2008**

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- Conceived and implemented graphic design layouts for artist promotions
- Managed and maintained artists' social networking sites (Myspace, Last.fm)

### **Folkvine.org**

*Videographer and Media Editor*

**Jan 2007 - May 2007**

Orlando, FL

- Filmed and edited videos and podcasts for an online digital research project
- Worked collaboratively with a team of professors and students to effectively convey project goals

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Final Report presentation for University of Oregon ePortfolio initiative at the Cohort V meeting of the Inter/National Coalition for Electronic Portfolio Research (Blacksburg, VA)

**February 2011**

Produced and presented interactive ChinaVine media installation at the 2011 Oregon Asian Celebration

**February 2011**

Media Manager at the 2011 Visual Culture Symposium (Portland, OR)

**February 2011**

***Taking The Tiger By The Tail: Managing Media in a Cross-Cultural Digital Research Project*** presentation at Folklorists in the South conference (Chapel Hill, NC)

**June 2010**

UO Graduate Student Research Forum poster and panel presentations

**April 2010**

Curated *Expressions of China*: traveling group photo exhibition (Orlando, FL; Eugene, OR; Cocoa, FL)

**Oct 2008 – June 2009**

Awarded UCF Undergraduate Student Research Grant to fund research fieldwork in China

**Jan 2008**

Presented a series of talks about folk culture and collaborative digital media projects to over 300 members of The Learning Institute for Elders at UCF (LIFE@UCF)

**Jan - Feb 2009**

Showcase of Undergraduate Research Excellence (SURE) poster presentation

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- Member of Americans For The Arts **Sept 2009 – Present**
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## **COMPUTER AND LANGUAGE SKILLS:**

Fluent in Spanish, working knowledge of French

Final Cut Pro, Adobe Creative Suite, Ableton Live, Logic Pro, Microsoft Office and Basic HTML

Exceptional knowledge of both Windows and Mac operating systems

## **Abstract**

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In this research project I explored the emerging landscape that web based and social media tools have provided for independent music producers as it relates to the production, promotion, and distribution of their work. After analyzing current literature, I examined the issues that exist in understanding the history, common practices and implications of emerging tools and strategies within the field. I designed a project that mapped current innovations and trends in the field, including tools, platforms and effective approaches to communicating and engaging audiences. I conducted interviews with four case studies that represent various aspects of the independent music industry. After analyzing these cases and the information provided by the interviewees, I addressed the emerging themes across the data and identified successful strategies and approaches to utilizing social networking and web-based platforms for the promotion and distribution of their work. This master's project will act as a guide for future independent music producers to understand the opportunities and strategies that the internet and social media provide for communicating and building sustainable communities. I concluded with a look at how Arts Administrators and Media Managers can adopt some of the same techniques and strategies to cultivate and engage committed constituents and patrons.

### **Key Words**

Internet, Social Media, Music, Independent, Producer, New Media, Promotion, Distribution, social networking, web-based, patrons

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## Chapter 1 | INTRODUCTION

## **Problem Statement**

With the advent and widespread adoption of the Internet came severe challenges for the music industry in the last decade. As a result and because of cheaper technology allowing for accessible recording and production of digital music, there has been a dramatic increase in the amount of independently produced music in the market. With the rise of the MP3 and increased pirating of music, traditional major record labels have struggled to hold on to their old business models. As the landscape evolved, the internet began offering a wide range of options for participating, collaborating, creating, and consuming media of all kinds (Wendel, 2008, Easley et al). Because of the flexibility and nimbleness of independent artists, they have begun taking advantage of these opportunities for the promotion and distribution of their music.

As physical album sales dropped, the prohibitive nature of the major label industry began to become apparent. In their book, *The Future Of Music*, David Kusek and Gerd Leonhard discuss how most major labels adhered to a system of releasing hundreds of albums a year in the hopes that one of them would sell enough to pay for the rest. They were losing money on the majority of the records they produced hoping to find one gem. According to Kusek and Leonhard, all of the middlemen involved in that system ended up “bleeding the system dry” (Kusek and Leonhard, 2005, p. 126).

With the collapse of the traditional record label business model, independent producers were able to use the open and evolving platforms and tools that the internet and new media were providing them to cut out the middlemen and more directly connect with the listeners, fans, and consumers. As such, some innovative and novel approaches to creating, promoting and distributing independent music have emerged and are continually evolving.

There have been several studies, highlighted in my literature review, on the different

forms of collaboration, promotion or distribution of independent music through the web-based tools. However, many of these studies are out dated or do not significantly draw connections between approaches and applications that lead to successful general strategies for independent producers of all kinds.

Through my research project I have evaluated the resources and existing data regarding new models of music promotion and distribution through the Internet. Combining that with specific case studies, I focused on the benefits that various tools can provide while trying to identify trends in audience engagement as they relate to Arts/Media management in general. This study will act as a map and guide to promotion, communication, distribution and consumption of media, focusing on the role that the Internet has played in expanding new models and approaches. My research provides future independent producers a guide to currently successful strategies and themes that run throughout these new and innovative models.

Several books, including *The Future of Music*, have been written describing a utopian view of what the decentralized “free” market of the Internet can and should provide artists and consumers. Ranging from free and openly distributed music to user generated recommendation networks providing access to artists and their music, these tools offer unique options for independent artists producing and distributing their music on their own.

Understanding the implications, opportunities and challenges that the Internet provides independent producers in the promotion and distribution of their work, as well as the connections it provides both the consumer and the producer, lead to the evaluation of an array of options with which to guide future cultural production. My analysis and ultimate conclusions highlight innovative and creative solutions to difficult and challenging problems facing independent music producers and provide a valuable resource for the 21<sup>st</sup> century

music maker.

### **Conceptual Framework:**

With my conceptual framework I have identified several avenues where the internet is having a profound impact on the strategies and practices of producers of independent music. By researching these areas of focus and how they relate to one another and back to my initial research question, I was able to map the various avenues and approaches by which producers are taking advantage of the internet to innovate and capitalize on the benefits of an independent promotion and dissemination process. **Appendix A** displays the graphical framework by which I am organizing my research project and final conclusions. The three main avenues of research are explored below through my detailed literature review. One of the common threads that bind these conceptual bins, is the idea that for many independent producers, using the Internet offers a bridge between the physical world and the digital/virtual environments of their online networks. Whether through participation or through distribution, the perceived binary between the analog and digital often must be challenged to take advantage of the benefits that a balanced approach can provide. As a parallel axis, the emergent independent music environment, both online and offline, creates questions about the relationship and roles of the consumer and producer; where consumers are able to interact with producers or even participate in the direction of the music and its marketing. There is a connection between these various areas of focus throughout all levels of the promotion and distribution process. Of course, the opportunities and strategies vary depending on the scope of each project.

To begin research on the emergent landscape that the Internet and online social media networks provide for independent music promotion and distribution, a thorough literature review was undertaken. This process helped to define key terms, understand current issues,

and identify common themes present in the field. I will explore issues of community and investment as it occurs over the Internet; across geographic and temporal boundaries. The evolution of social networks and media also provides opportunities to explore audience engagement and communication in virtual and physical environments that expand the notion of a traditional music 'scene'. Another significant development with the evolution of the web-based social networks and crowd sourcing tools, is the prospect of new and exciting business models that independent artists are taking advantage of for the distribution of their work. I also examined the shifting roles of producer and consumer within the evolving independent music landscape at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Not only does identifying these themes help to address and define the current research problem, but it also forces a deeper look into tangential areas of study and research, such as independent publications and film production. This holistic perspective helped to interpret and condense the large and expanding field of study in question, while providing a frame through which to draw connections and identify trends for current independent producers and arts managers.

### **Purpose Statement**

After reviewing relevant research and understanding the historical and current landscape for music producers, it seems the major label paradigms are no longer viable for independent producers. Web-based and social media tools have provided an open platform for exploring new ways of creating, promoting, and disseminating music. With these new models and approaches to the promotion, distribution, and business practices of independent producers, there are a wide array of opportunities and strategies for maximizing the potential in these new platforms and tools. The purpose of this research project is to identify current strategies and emergent opportunities in the development, production, promotion and

distribution of independent music through web-based social networking tools and platforms. Those strategies and tools can provide valuable insight for Arts Administrators and Media Managers looking to utilize similar approaches for promoting and disseminating their work, projects, or organizations.

### **Research Questions**

As highlighted above, there are various conceptual frames within which this research project will venture. However, it is important to outline the specific questions that will guide my research, interpretation, and analysis.

Main Question:

- How are independent producers successfully using the Internet and social networking tools in the promotion and distribution of their music and work?

Secondary questions helped to guide research into conceptual pillars and tie those findings back to my main question and line of inquiry.

Secondary Questions:

- How do independent producers successfully navigate between physical and the virtual environments or networks found on the Internet?
- What are some communications and messaging strategies employed across various social networking platforms?
- What social media and web-based participatory models are independent producers and artists successfully implementing?
- What new business models, harnessing the power of the internet, are current independent producers exploring?

## **Methodological Paradigm**

The nature of the current independent music landscape is such that it is constantly evolving as new trends and practices emerge. As individual artists and producers begin experimenting with new models using the open and expanding tools at their disposal, new and innovative approaches will emerge. In order to continue to be relevant and timely with this assessment, my methods had to be both fluid and adaptable.

As a “Bricoleur”, I have chosen to adopt a mixed methodology in conducting this research project (O'Leary, 2009). The individual cases and subjective nature of new creation models and trends clearly situates itself within a qualitative realm of interpretation. However, I expanded this research with an examination of existing data from previously conducted research that supported or directed my lines of inquiry. This approach allowed for an in-depth exploration of specific trends within the field while strengthening my findings with the support of quantitative information (O'Leary, 2009).

While this method allowed me some flexibility in designing my research, I further articulated the parameters with which decisions about data selection and collection were made. Personally and professionally I have an interest in the future of independent music production and innovative emerging media tools, so I tried to be cognizant of that fact in interpreting and analyzing data. I strived for a fair assessment and have highlighted trends and common practices that appear across all or most of my resources and findings to ensure that my biases did not skew the results of this research.

## **Research Approach**

With the mixed and fluid methods I chose and the nature of the research itself, it seemed only natural that an evaluative research approach would be the most logical in

attempting to address the effectiveness of tools and strategies that I studied. Understanding O'Leary's definition, I focused more specifically on the formative/process concepts as I was concerned with the reasoning behind choosing certain tactics and tools. With a slant towards understanding the producer's perspective, this process allowed me to gain an inside knowledge of the motivations and intentions behind new promotion or distribution models as they relate to my research. However, in keeping with the mixed approach to my methodology, I tried to take a larger perspective on general strategies that have wider implications for Arts Administrators and Media Managers.

### **Strategy of Inquiry**

The most appropriate strategies for partaking in research for this project revolve around understanding new and emergent models for promotion and distribution of independent music. One clear way way of getting an in depth view was to examine case studies that exemplified or challenged the different conceptual themes I developed through my comprehensive literature review. This literature review is critical in understanding the greater picture of the independent music environment at this point in history. It certainly allowed me to identify trends and particular strategies that warranted a deeper examination.

Once case studies were selected that examined the methods employed by independent producers, the platforms or tools they utilized, and the most effective communications strategies, I sought to gain the reasoning behind their decision making processes. To maximize that data collection process, I sought out specific individuals that are leaders in the field. Once selected, I conducted semi-structured interviews in order to get a more personal perspective to my research questions.



## **Timeline**

During the Summer of 2010 I began preliminary readings and research. By Fall of 2010 I finished my proposal and began selecting case studies and participants. I continued initial data collection through the Winter of 2011, conducting interviews in early Spring of 2011. Continuing, I began my analysis and completed my preliminary writing starting by May of 2011. I then completed my final draft in June of 2011.

## **Research Design Considerations**

The selection of particular case studies and programs to highlight within my research depended on what I found in my preliminary reading and research phases. The preliminary literature review that I conducted needed to be expanded through personal narratives gleaned through an interview process. This process was important as it helped to highlight specific projects or platforms that I wanted to examine in my analysis. These case studies were selected to provide both the specific real world examples of innovative entrepreneurial thinking, as well as the types of processes that have a much more general appeal and application in arts management.

The term “independent” is defined in many ways, and I would like to discuss how I am approaching the use of that term and how my case studies fit into those categorizations. Overall, the way in which I am broadly defining independent music producers is any one artist or organization that does not have the support of a major record label or corporate entity. The cases I chose to study portray the range of possibilities within that definition, from a very niche musician who is producing all of his work on his own, to an established independent record label with significantly more resources and support for their artists. The tools available to these artists and organizations are ultimately the same, but I wanted to highlight the opportunities and flexibility that independent production can provide with or without

significant resources to support their implementation.

I understand that within every evaluative research approach and every subject selected for participation comes a set of vested interests and biases. It was important to understand those interests and biases and filter out responses that were given to sell a particular point of view. Selections were made to limit those types of respondents and responses. I am a fan of the artists that I interviewed and thus there is an inherent bias in highlighting these cases. Being aware of these biases, I've attempted to highlight only relevant anecdotes and focus on objectively successful strategies that were employed to either further audience engagement or spread their product across various social networks.

With the correct resources, I have been able to more fully understand the particulars of independent music promotion and distribution. I tried to keep the process and decision making as emergent as possible and allowed it to develop as I become more involved and experienced with the material. It certainly was a continual learning process and I embraced that process in order to fully engage with and take advantage of this immersive project.

## Chapter 2 | Review of Literature

## Communication and Collaboration

Yochai Benkler in *The Wealth Of Networks: How Social Production Transforms Markets and Freedom* discusses how with the development of the Internet and the mass production of cheap computer processors our economy has shifted from one of manufacturing production to one of information production (Benkler, 2006). The economy of the past century has been increasingly focused on the production of information, whether financial services, sciences, or cultural production, that moves away from material products towards intangible services. With the move towards a communications environment, we are providing an increasing role for non-market and decentralized patterns of production that Benkler refers to as the “Networked Information Economy” (Benkler, 2006, p. 3). Benkler argues that this new economic system provides an opportunity to explore the democratic ideal of a free and open network to share and contribute to the collective intelligence of our society.

Like with many forms of art, the production and distribution processes of music often begin and end with collaborations. Whether it is a collaboration of artists or musicians, or whether it is between artists and consumers, the collaborative process has evolved with the advent of the Internet. With the rise of the Internet and new Web 2.0/3.0 tools, it is becoming easier to collaborate and communicate across spatial and temporal distances.

Another aspect of the new economic and social landscape that has evolved with the rise of the Internet is the idea that Henry Jenkins, in his book *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*, terms 'participatory culture'. “The term, participatory culture contrasts with older notions of passive media spectatorship. Rather than talking about media producers and consumers as occupying separate roles, we might see them as participants who interact with each other according to a new set of rules that none of us fully understands (Jenkins, 2006, Chapter 1, para. 8).” These types of practices and interactions offer organic

means of discovery and information transfer between parties that historically have occupied very different spheres. Understanding how this type of communication is processed is often referred to as “convergence”, another quintessential Jenkins term, which he describes as “the flow of content across multiple media platforms, the cooperation between multiple media industries, and the migratory behavior of media audiences who will go almost anywhere in search of the kinds of entertainment experiences they want (Jenkins, 2006, Chapter 1, para. 6).”

The rise of the Internet and social media has made the act of collaboration and production of music a dynamic and innovative environment. Pauline Oliveres in *Pauline Oliveres in the Arms of Reynolds: A Collaboration* explores tools used in this evolving landscape for musicians working on an album. This dynamic environment allows producers to explore ways of working together that don't necessitate a direct face-to-face meeting or interaction, often times across various media. In Oliveres' article, the author describes the process of an web-based musical collaboration in Argentina. The writing phase between the artists in this band is done completely remotely. These remote “jam” sessions are their sole performances and as such, they are then recorded and distributed over those same web-based communication channels (Oliveres, 2007). This idea of internet collaboration begins to bring up questions about the enormous possibilities for international and global partnerships and interactions. This collaborative process also opens the door for further study of contemporary tools in facilitating similar participatory processes in production.

In Sergi Jorda's article *Faust Music On Line: An Approach to Real-Time Collective Composition on the Internet*, about a rendition of the opera Faust, the author explores tools and frameworks for real time collaborations over the Internet. This piece highlights some intriguing and experimental tools and methods for collaboration including using e-mail and

chat services as well as custom built “games” for musical collaboration with strangers across the web. Jorda begins to ask deeper questions about authority and authorship, in that as with sampling, the final piece is defined by the multiple influences and not necessarily by a definable path to authorship. Jorda explains “The secret evolution of any piece may be hard to follow; but on the occasions when it is desired or encouraged, the resultant collective creations exhibit an artistic expressivity that comprises both the sum of all the participants’ work and an expression of all the social interchanges that took place during this interactive process (Jorda, 1999, p. 8).” The question of authorship comes up when discussing collaborations both in person and over the web. The increase of participatory cultural production explores fundamental ethical and theoretical dilemmas surrounding collaboration between consumer and producer and the many forms that takes over the Internet (Jorda, 1999).

The web 2.0/3.0 world creates opportunities for fluid, dynamic, and transparent connection between consumer and producer of content. In “Does Chatter Matter? The Impact of User-Generated Content on Music Sales”, Authors Vasant Dhar Elaine A. Chang explore the impacts that specific Web 2.0 and social networking applications have on music sales. This straightforward look at how user generated content can affect music sales is extremely important and relevant to independent artists who are trying to expand their sales as much as possible. The authors find a direct correlation between the number of blog posts or online mentions to how well an album or single sells. They have identified a complex algorithm that determines the percentage of increased album sales after an increased number of blog posts. This specific quantitative data can be mined to effectively support the qualitative data I cultivated through my research. This pragmatic look at social media practices explores the shifting hierarchy in internet communications and the power that consumers have in a more

decentralized open environment that the Internet provides.

Understanding the possibilities and limitations of Web 2.0 applications and practices provides a wide representation of how the Internet has affected independent music distribution. This specialized market conceptualization allows for a customized and flexible approach to generating a living for independent artists in the Internet era. Collaboration, social networks, communication standards and new business models are all pieces that affect the production and distribution of independent music. Through these processes, combined with user generated/user driven applications the production and distribution of independent media is changing and being redefined. However, with the wealth of information and data that bombard us every day, we must look at ways that music producers and consumers collaborate to break through the noise and rise above the crowd.

David Kusek, Gerd Leonhard, and Susan Gedutis Lindsay offer a utopian view of how technology and widespread adoption of internet tools will redefine the corporate music industry in their book *The Future Of Music: Manifesto For The Digital Music Revolution* . Though slightly biased in its construction, the following quote highlights a significant challenge to a predominately technophilic adoption of these tools without careful consideration to any consequences of these actions, “On the flip side of this tidal wave of cool technology, we are facing a unique situation. We have morphed from the politically motivated self-constraints of corporate media in the U.S. and the sluggishness of public broadcasting in Europe, to a violent blast of media and information coming at us 24/7/365...We will all have to learn how to deal with a fifteen-mile-long virtual buffet of media and data (Kusek, Leonhard, & Lindsay, 2005, p. 168).” This quote asks us to consider and address ways in which we contribute to and sift through the constant drone of completely unfettered communication via the Internet.

## **Scenes and Social Networks**

In an article titled *Sonic City: The Evolving Economic Geography of the Music Industry*, Richard Florida and Scott Jackson offer a review of the mainstream economic models of the music industry during the 1990s. Part of those economies rely on physical locations that act as centers for activity surrounding the production and distribution of music. In the article the authors discuss the importance of the spatial context in creating independent music through collaboration. “Furthermore, musicians show a tendency to concentrate in geographical creative centers referred to as “scenes” , says Florida. The “scene” concept is important in thinking about how to either recreate or re-imagine an online collaborative space as a tool through which to expand the physical (social) networks that artists cultivate, through touring and face to face interaction (Florida, Jackson, 2009). This article and the concept of “scenes” prompts further inquiry into how musicians leverage these physical spaces and networks into virtual environments.

Holy Kruse, in her book *Site and Sound: Understanding Independent Music Scenes*, describes local and regional independent music scenes in the 1980's and 90's. In the book she focuses on a few specific artists and music scenes such as Austin, Seattle, and Athens, Georgia, that highlight the spaces and people that make up the intangible notion of a scene. These scenes are discussed as being rooted in place, a particular place that attracts and encourages a particular mindset or collective experience. Kruse states that “Localities, as both geographic and social sites, do not exist in isolation: they are nodes in social and economic networks and derive meanings from their relationships with and to other localities...not merely bounded entities but also as 'articulated moments in networks of social relations and understanding.” Traditional models and methods of forming and growing a community of like minded individuals show a correlation between locality and personal histories related to specific



genres of music (Kruse, 2003, p. 114). Through shared personal histories rooted in place and intangible networks of engaged and invested fans and musicians, do these scenes and social networks develop. “Local scenes are places in relationship to each other through the circulation of music, knowledge, and style; and they are part of social and economic networks that both structure and are structured by this set of relations. (Kruse, 2003, p. 127)” These relations exist as a collective experience that helps populate the networks. It is important to explore how these scenes have evolved on the Internet and transform or evolve through online social networks.

The concept of “scenes” and an historical analysis of the environments that support these physical networks establishes a framework through which to explore how online social networks develop, interact and ultimately create a community. Gil Weinberg in *Interconnected Musical Networks: Toward a Theoretical Framework* explores the foundation and evolution of what Kruse describes as a “scene”. In attempting to define the networks that musicians use when creating and distributing music, Weinberg describes the physical or traditional networks for exchanging information and collaborating. He describes the four main innovations that have helped to develop interdependent musical projects and collaborations, The Server, Bridge, Shaper, and Construction Kit approaches. The Server approach is where information is sent back and forth to participants but does not take advantage of opportunities to communicate *between* participants. The Bridge refers to the technical facilitation of multiple participants to hear and play simultaneously with each other, but does not attempt to enhance participation in any way. The Shaper model is where the network or computer becomes an active participant by algorithmically producing music to contribute. The Construction Kit approach is where multiple composers can add their music, reorganize and manipulate their own contributions and those of others. By grasping the

underlying issues of interdependence and the benefits of a connected network, one begins to see the value in creating and maintaining a strong social network both in the physical world and on the Internet. Weinberg's study extends his research into models of collaboration using the Internet and again provides the methods, tools, and motivations that can be used as a framework for future independent distribution on the Web (Weinberg, 2005).

Andrew Mall takes this idea one step further in describing the communities surrounding independent music. In his article, "What Would the Community Think: Communal Values in Independent Music", Mall provides a look at how artists authentically create active communities around their music (2006). Through several transcribed encounters with music participants, the author explains how seemingly innocuous conversations one has in a bar, can act to strengthen and expand the community or network surrounding an independent music artist. The progression of those communities into the virtual world is examined in how those conversations provide support and publicity for the independent artists. Exploring tools like independent artist websites and online social networks, he explains that an artist's online presence might be more powerful than if they had gone with a more traditional method of information distribution because consumers feel like they have a direct connection with the artist. Mall concludes that independent music consumers and producers appreciate the values of connoisseurship, the DIY aesthetic, social networks, and active participation of non-musicians in an authentic music community. By explicitly describing those values, one would be able to glean a good amount of information as to how to give voice to an artist's communications through web-based social networking tools (Mall, 2006). This piece really hits at the heart of the question about social networks and the importance of cultivating a strong physical community while elaborating and exploiting the benefits of virtual networks.

## **Dissemination and Compensation**

Kusek, et al, wrote about the role of the internet in the distribution of music, the rise of the mp3, and explored the unique position that an independent or “indie” musician can play in this evolving landscape (Kusek and Leonhard, 2005). Over the past decade and a half there has been a significant shift in traditional models for production and distribution throughout the music industry, specifically with the consolidation and dismantling of the corporate driven “major label” system. The major labels, with their vast resources, would produce fifty different albums at a loss in the hopes that one of those albums would end up finding success enough to pay for all of the rest. Traditionally, independent artists have been more flexible than their counter parts in a major label; where higher costs feed an expansive production and distribution channel. The same can still be said today, however with the disappearance of potential major label support for many of these artists, they must take a more active role in the direction of their careers. The independent producer, in this converging media landscape, is forced to take on much more administrative responsibilities in the dissemination of their work.

Kruse details the traditional dissemination models and practices for independent music producers of the 1980's and 90's, including radio, videos, retail, and live performances. These forms of dissemination practices, which were modeled on the major label system and widely accepted as common practice, did not provide independent producers much room for freedom in how they distributed their music. Though there were plenty of ways of creatively employing these tools, cost became a significant factor in limiting the exposure of independent artists without support.

As Bruce Horner and Thomas Swiss wrote about in the book, *Key terms in popular music and culture*, college radio stations played a large part in how audiences found out about

local, regional, and national independent artists that were not part of the corporate distribution system. Today, internet radio, like Pandora and Last.Fm, have largely replaced this model as an alternative to commercially broadcasted radio. Not only do these stations provide an expanded listening base, but they incorporate user generated preferences and recommendations in their programming, enabling the consumer to control and curate their own personalized music stream (Horner and Swiss, 1999).

The emergence of MTV and the short form music video played an important role in getting independent artists seen on a national scale in the 80's and 90's, beginning to expand the scope of the music's influence. However, this was a highly political and monetarily influenced process that often left independently produced videos only getting air play during late night rotations on MTV (Kruse, 2003). Ultimately, it proved to be rather cost prohibitive for independent artists to compete with major label backed producers for air play. However, the consolidation of mainstream media has shifted the dissemination channels for these type of music videos. Online video uploading sites like YouTube have enabled anyone to generate content and share it across their network. The advent of less costly and more compact video equipment has driven the cost down on video production for independent artists and consumers alike, using these online tools, independent producers are able to make and distribute these videos to a wider audience allowing that same consumer group to spread the product across their own networks (Jenkins, 2006).

Traditional retail outlets, specifically independent record stores, provided independent producers a viable outlet for the sale of their products through much of the twentieth century. Kruse argues that they were not only points of sale, but “social interaction zones”, where people could come get recommendations, advice, and exchange general knowledge about specific independent music scenes and artists. With the consolidation of big chain music

retailers and the eventual buy out of many of the nations independent record stores, combined with the decrease in sales of physical albums with the rise of the MP3, many of these central information and retail hubs disappeared (Kusek and Leonhard, 2005). This is one outlet that does not have a good direct digital representation that fulfills many of the same needs for consumers and producers alike. Many different digital distributors have emerged including Apple's iTunes network, yet none fully embrace the the multi-faceted nature of these “social interaction zones”. Consumers must navigate between several online tools and social networking sites that meet these varied needs including sites that provide artist recommendations according to your documented likes and dislikes, as well as websites that provide forums for participation and interaction between consumers and fans.

Live performances continue to be the avenue in which independent music artists make the majority of their revenue. The social and communal act of witnessing a live music performance is still a very real and powerful experience that draws music consumers and fans out to support the artists, socially and financially (Kruse, 2003). The internet has enabled independent artists to book shows, sell tickets, and update fans about their tours and live performances. Consumers are able to participate and interact with each other to give reviews about shows and exchange recordings of the live performances via a multitude of Websites and tools.

The rapid increase in technological power and the decrease in cost for many of these tools has compounded the convergence of media production for independent producers. Producers are able to record music, make videos, submit their music to internet radio, and distribute their media products to consumers all on their own, bypassing many of the barriers that a traditional physically-based industry constructed, allowing independent producers to connect directly with engaged consumers (Kusek and Leonhard, 2005).

It's hard to imagine how independent artists actively use the traditional tools and models of the 80s and 90s as a viable means of dissemination and compensation in the age of the internet. However there are comparable tools and practices today that are the evolution of these traditional models, but expanded on a global scale. Jenkins, in describing independent television distribution says "One can imagine independent media producers using downloads as a way of distributing content that would never make it onto commercial television. And, of course, once you distribute via the Web, television instantly becomes global, paving the way for international producers to sell their content directly to American consumers (Jenkins, 2006, Chapter 8, para. 35 )." This model can be seen in the way that niche independent producers distribute their content to similarly like-minded consumers across the globe expanding the traditional place-based independent music scenes while building on the direct interaction and participation between consumer and producer.

In "Broadcasting in Online Social Networks: An Empirical Study of Music Sales and Artists' Activities", Hailiang Chen, Prabuddha De, and Yu Jeffrey Hu conduct a data rich analysis of how music sales on Amazon.com are affected by the frequency and type of content delivered by artists on Myspace (2009). Though Myspace is not as relevant today as when this study was conducted, it still is a viable tool for dissemination of music and news from independent artists. The study's results show that "recent activity" posts, like status updates, were more effective than general blog posts in prompting high album sales through Amazon. Through concrete data, the authors show the relationship between increased activity and increased music sales.

Sanjeev Dewan and Jui Ramaprasad in a student authored paper entitled " Impact of Blogging on Music Sales: The Long Tail Effect", study the usage patterns of blog posts, music sample downloads, and album sales (2007). The research finds that blog readers are far more

likely than the overall music purchasing population to buy music that was suggested by blogs that they respect. The authors also find that when music is available to sample on a blog post, readers who sample that material are more likely to purchase the music. As detailed in the article, Dewan and Ramaprasad explain how blogs cater to a different audience from the mainstream music audience, though they have a stronger influence on music purchasing for this non-mainstream audience. This article highlights how peer recommendation and online “Word Of Mouth” do in fact have a positive impact on music sales.

In his master's thesis, “New Potentials for “Independent” Music: Social Networks, Old and New, and the Ongoing Struggles to Reshape the Music Industry”, from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Evan Wendel describes a case study about the 2007 Radiohead album, *In Rainbows*. After many years on a large major label, the band decided to release their new album independently, experimenting with innovative forms of payment and compensation. There are varying reports as to the effectiveness and success of this experiment, but it surely proved that mainstream artists could break free of traditional distribution methods and experiment with new forms of independent distribution and compensation (Wendel, 2008).

In “The Internet is Changing the Music Industry”, Calvin Lam and Bernard Tan explore the shift in traditional distribution paradigms as it pertains to the music industry as a whole. Over the last decade or two the role of traditional distribution channels has dramatically shifted. The authors attempt to comment on new and coming best practices and industry standards for distribution using the Internet. The article focuses heavily on online retailers as an example. Though somewhat out of date by now, the article is important in understanding where the historical shift towards mp3's and away from full album purchases began. By breaking open the traditional model, which according to Lam and Tan, was guarded by large

corporate interests, the competition within the industry is expanding and consumers are given more freedoms in getting their music (Lam and Tam, 2001).

Of course when discussing the Internet as a distribution tool, we must explore the world revolving around the MP3. Steve Jones and Amanda Lenhart in their article “Music Downloading and Listening: Findings from the Pew Internet and American Life Project, Popular Music and Society”, use Pew Internet research to investigate the trends in music downloading and listening. Jones and Lenhart were able to highlight the importance of this medium and the means through which it has transformed the way we consume music. Specifically, the historical background of MP3 technology, the emergence of file sharing sites like Napster, and the widespread adoption of MP3 players. Without truly researching the history and implications of the MP3 as a medium, future research would be lacking an essential ingredient to understanding the complexities of web-based distribution of music (Jones and Lenhart, 2004).

Roman Hoegg, Robert Martignoni, Miriam Meckel, Katarina Stanoevska-Slabeva, in their piece entitled “Overview of Business Models For Web 2.0 Communities”, attempt to work Web 2.0 communities into business models (2005). Web 2.0 communities are an extremely important tool in the promotion of music through the web-based means. Understanding the affects of specific business models in this environment expands on the idea of building strong communities and networks around a music scene, whether virtually or physically. Hoegg et al discuss how to exploit these networks for financial gain, where producers can profit from sustained dialogue with their consumers using social media tools. Hoegg et al, commented on various tools, practices, and products that would ultimately take advantage of the participatory and evolving nature of Web 2.0 communities. Though not specifically focused on the music industry, the article provides numerous charts and graphs



that help to show the relationship between business development and various Web 2.0 applications(Hoegg et al, 2005).

Jenkins and others explore the ways that audiences and consumers interact with and participate in the dissemination of media that they like. He draws the distinction between interactivity and participation in the following quotes: “Interactivity refers to the ways that new technologies have been designed to be more responsive to consumer feedback. One can imagine differing degrees of interactivity enabled by different communication technologies...The constraints on interactivity are technological (Jenkins, 2006, Chapter 4, para. 8).” He goes on to explain how “Participation, on the other hand, is shaped by the cultural and social protocols. Participation is more open-ended, less under the control of media producers and more under the control of media consumers (Jenkins, 2006, Chapter 4, para. 9).” This highlights how media producers should use technological opportunities for interactivity while allowing for participation which is less controlled by their own wishes and driven primarily by consumers.

Its important to discuss how the Internet has enabled opportunities for interacting with media content while simultaneously offering unexpected ways of participation with and relation to that content, its consumers and producers. Jenkins points to this change when he said, “Allowing consumers to interact with media under controlled circumstances is one thing; allowing them to participate in the production and distribution of cultural goods- on their own terms – is something else all together. (Jenkins, 2006, Chapter 4, para. 10)” The development of crowd-sourced and funded technologies that allow for the interaction between consumers and producers has provided a more participatory engagement with the content and its compensation and distribution.

Yochai Benkler in describing cultural production in the twenty first century highlights

how networks allow for a more participatory and engaging culture. “The networked information economy makes it possible to reshape both the 'who' and the 'how' of cultural production relative to cultural production in the twentieth century...It makes culture more transparent to its inhabitants. It makes the process of cultural production more participatory, in the sense that more of those who live within a culture can actively participate in its creation...Through these twin characteristics – transparency and participation – the networked information economy also creates greater space for critical evaluation of cultural materials and tools. The practice of producing culture makes us all more sophisticated readers, viewers, and listeners as well as more engaged makers (Benkler, 2006, p. 293)”

Benkler challenges that the opportunities for consumers to become participants in the production of culture, produce a more engaged and critical consumer. Exploring tools that allow for more informed and discerning consumers helps to break through the information overload, find and promote more focused media interests, and develop more expansive dissemination networks. The tools that incorporate participatory practices in music recommendation, funding, and engagement provide a more transparent and discerning environment for independent music producers (Benkler, 2006).

## Chapter 3 | Case Studies

## BLUE SCHOLARS

### **History/Background**

Blue Scholars is an independent hip hop duo based out of Seattle, Washington. The duo was formed in 2002 when producer/DJ Sabzi (Alexei Saba Mohajerjasbi) and MC Geologic (George Quibuyen; also known as Prometheus Brown) met while attending the University of Washington. The duo began to produce music together and released their first full length album, self-titled 2004 release, *Blue Scholars*. Coming from community organizing roots, their music and extra curricular activities address themes ranging from social and economic injustice, support for the Filipino and Asian communities and a love for their city. Subsequent releases include 2007's *Bayani*, and several shorter EPs that lead to over 400 live performances alongside some of the most popular names in hip hop. They've headlined their own tours, played large regional festivals and have even performed at labor organizing conferences and youth-run community centers.

### **Approach**

The Blue Scholars have consistently utilized internet tools in the promotion and distribution of their music since the inception of their career. After forming in 2002 and releasing their first self titled album in 2004, the duo began to use Myspace as a tool to reach out to fans, post their music, and connect with other artists. They built an html website on their own and began experimenting with “pre-blogs” and web journal platforms like Live Journals to write about their music and give voice to their ideas.

Geologic describes the process of adopting new platforms as organic and experimental. The Blue Scholars would follow the trends and try emergent social platforms or networks in an attempt to stay current and connected with their listeners. This process was informed not

only by actively engaging with these tools as individuals but also by being fans of music and other artists. Adopting and adapting the tools and strategies that worked for others shaped into an evolving approach to utilizing the Internet and social media tools for promotion.

Today, that strategy has evolved to include the use of a fully fledged WordPress driven website, blog, Facebook page, Twitter account, Tumblr page, and YouTube channel. Their approach marked by a balanced trial-and-error experimentation is held together by a consistent voice and the facilitation of dialogue with fans. Utilizing their website as an informational hub, the other social networking platforms and tools act as a means to engage fans with content and ultimately provide opportunities to further explore the group and their projects.

The Blue Scholars' strategy towards incorporating these tools into their communications is highly fluid and often changes from week to week. Only a few years ago their primary source of connection with their fans was a frequently updated blog where users could subscribe to an RSS feed. Now, they've seen that outlet is being eclipsed by Facebook, Twitter, and Tumblr. Geologic has noticed that the more content they can provide to followers with the least amount of work on the user's part seems to be the most effective. Utilizing Facebook's platform to embed music, images, or videos creates many more impressions of that media than if you required the user to click on a link to a 3<sup>rd</sup> party website.

Their approach to creating media is informed by a desire to create quality content that is relevant and interesting to their fans. This content has included live video streams from studio sessions, behind-the-scenes videos and photos, tour updates and photos, as well as free music downloads. There is a desire to balance artistic presentation and informative engaging content. That balanced approach carries to the extent of their involvement in online networking as opposed to honing their craft as musicians and performers. Geo spoke to the

importance of having a “tight” live performance for people to want to share and advocate for the group through their own networks.

Their engagement of fans centers around an authentic mix of promotion and dialogue. A recent example of this is when the group was designing a new logo for merchandise, they uploaded the different design proofs on their Facebook page asking fans to pick their favorite one, the design with the most votes would be the selected design and printed on their merchandise for sale. This highlights their approach to listening to fans opinions and giving them what they want. This not only ensures that the merchandise will sell more units, but that fans feel invested and have a sense of ownership in the groups actions.

## **Applications**

The group has attempted to experiment with distribution and compensation models in the past. As a result of the timing of their formation as a group, the duo had little option but to conform to distribution methods developed for major labels with tons of money to spend. These methods primarily focused around producing a physical album in the form of a CD that was released nationally through the independent distributors of a major record label. Those CDs were then distributed to large and small retailers across the country from mom and pop stores to big box stores like Best Buy. Often times the group would see little return from that distribution channel without expressed investment in a national promotional campaign.

After the release of their second album Bayani, they began to notice a “tide shift” away from what was a viable economic model of independent distribution. From there, they began to look at new ways of engaging with audiences and releasing their work to their fans. After years of struggling to find a record deal that would satisfy their need for complete creative freedom and control, the group experimented with different distribution models. One such

model was working out a low-interest loan from a prominent seattle coffee company, Cafe Vita, that would cover the cost of production and recording while hiring Duck Down Records to do distribution and promotion for their EP, *OOF!*.

Most recently the Blue Scholars decided to forgo many of the traditional models of distribution to print and distribute their latest album on their own. This involved declining to pursue a wide retail distribution effort, instead choosing to distribute the album directly to their fans and small independent retailers that showed an interest in selling the album. This process was envisioned as an extensive pre-sale of the album that would pay for the printing and shipping of the first run of CDs. After contemplating several models for achieving this goal and having followed or contributed to other Kickstarter projects, the group decided to create their own Kickstarter campaign that would allow them to “sign directly to the people” as opposed to accruing a large amount of debt to press the new album.

Geologic describes the Kickstarter campaign as an experiment in “word of mouth” marketing. With only a “gentle” push from the group through their online channels and no outside promotional efforts through publicists or blogs, the group was able to more than double their goal of \$25,000 in only 45 days. The approach to this campaign was to look at the fans not just as consumers but as investors, offering a variety of tangible incentives that would inspire donations and investments. Relying on a base of dedicated supporters and long time collaborators to act as their “1<sup>st</sup> line of ambassadors” or “field generals” the campaign spread by word of mouth and social networks to the point where over 2,000 highly dedicated supporters gave over \$65,000 towards the release of their new album *Cinemetropolis*.

## HEARTH MUSIC

### **History/Background**

Hearth Music is an independent, grassroots artist promotion agency focused on promoting independent Roots, Americana, and World music. As an agency they provide online and offline publicity, graphic design services, and artist career consultation for Folk and Roots musicians looking to expand their audiences. Hearth Music was founded in 2009 by Devon Leger with the idea that he could help artists if they were able to “move fast, think quickly, and adapt to new technologies”. This model was one that consolidated most aspects of the music industry, from promotion, design, and distribution, in one agency that took advantage of new technologies and tools to provide all of those same functions in a less expensive, more effective and sustainable manner.

Devon Leger worked for many years at the Northwest Folklife Festival as a booker and promoter for the festival and artists. He spent years investigating and experimenting with new tools and platforms to determine new and interesting ways to leverage those resources to circumvent the collapsing music industry models.

### **Approach**

Hearth Music and Legers' approach is one that identifies the music producers as content providers and the consumers as patrons and investors. They leverage the unique strengths of specific social network platforms and web-based tools enabling a more engaged connection between producer and consumer. Having utilized Myspace heavily for discovering new artists and connecting directly to them and their work, Leger realizes the unique potential that the Internet offers independent artists that did not exist 10 years ago. Today Hearth Music employs a WordPress enabled website, active blog, Facebook, Twitter, and Bandcamp



as successful models for independent artist promotion.

Leger describes the internet as the “wild west” where ethics, standards of practice, and strategies are still being explored and developed. “It’s like the wild wild west, there are no laws out there. Everything on the internet is too new to have many laws, if any laws (personal communication, April 2011).” More engaged consumers will seek out an artist and want to know more about their work and want to be offered new ways of being more involved and invested. Leger also suggest that artists balance real world and tangible offerings with authentic connections via online communications platforms.

A successful way in which Hearth Music uses different platforms is creating different voices or “personas” for each platform. On Twitter they may be more relaxed, edgy and snarky, where Facebook is slightly more professional or conversational in tone. Their website and blog are the main informational hub for what they do and that still adheres to a very professional tone and writing style as the main public image of the organization, while the other platforms help engage users and draw them to the website for more information. These different voices also help to diversify their communications. Leger suggests that at most 50 percent of the posts on Twitter should be self promotional, the rest should be about promoting other interesting projects that inspire, prompting dialogue with questions, and responding to questions and comments. He suggests not being afraid to ask for help or ask your fans opinions, offering different levels of engagement for the people who want to be more actively involved.

Leger recommends that artists view the process “like a pinball” where consumers have many different connection points that multiply their experiences with the content. “You don’t want the one step they take into your world to be the only step they take into your world, they have to keep walking in, they have to keep seeing stuff they want to check out in your world

(Leger, personal communication, April 2011).” He explains that you can't just have an online presence, you need to provide them an avenue to come out and meet you. The same is true in the opposite sense, if you have a network of people that comes to shows, you should be able to provide them a way to continue engaging online, so that they share their enthusiasm and continue supporting your future endeavors. He also addresses the importance of utilizing these tools to build and serve artists' communities.

## CHRIS SCHLARB

### **History/Background**

Chris Schlarb is an experimental producer, composer and musician based out of Long Beach, California. Schlarb founded and managed a record label focusing on Experimental, Jazz, and Electronic music called Sounds Are Active. As a musician he has released two solo albums and collaborated with a wide range of musicians including Sufjan Stevens, Nels Cline, and Daedelaus. His latest album featured a 29-musician ensemble and blurred genres from Jazz to Chamber Music. As a composer, Schlarb has worked to create and define moods and spaces including in the critically acclaimed 2011 independent video game, *NightSky*.

### **Approach**

Schlarb has a unique perspective towards his use of the Internet and social media tools for promotion and distribution. He appreciates and understands the place and value of various social networking platforms but does not actively promote his endeavors, rather, he uses these tools to continue building direct connections with a small group of invested fans. Utilizing each tool to his advantage, Schlarb employs a WordPress enabled website and blog, Facebook and Twitter accounts, Soundcloud for audio streaming and Vimeo for videos, as well as a Bandcamp page for his latest album, *Psychic Temple*.

As an artist that defies conventional categorization he appeals to a much more niche audience. As such, he is able to make direct often personal connections with his fans. Schlarb approaches his communication strategy as a user or fan, thinking about what promotional methods would feel inauthentic from a fans perspective. Schlarb is admittedly sensitive to direct promotional messages through his social networks and is often reluctant to self promote projects or initiatives. Instead he occasionally provides media content through these

tools, allowing for eager fans to discover and share the content on their own. He essentially allows people to become as engaged as they want to be without him “telling them what to do all the time (Schlarb, personal communication, April 2011).” He believes people who are the most enthusiastic or interested in finding out more will then seek him out.

Schlarb uses his website as a central information center where people can come to find out all the detailed information they are seeking, including music and video samples and performance information. He then uses Twitter and Facebook to communicate and dialogue with his fans, often times automatically syndicating his tweets to Facebook. He limits his self-promotional postings on social networks to 20% of his messages or communications. Weary of proliferating a one-way communication stream of constantly asking his fans to give and do things, he promotes building a sustainable relationship where he is consistently giving something in return, often free music or videos. Though wanting to provide a consistent voice, he is frequently aware of being too repetitive in his posting habits. He wants to keep things interesting to both he and his fans by providing engaging and fresh content.

Schlarb is most often solicited for work through e-mail or one of his online social networks. It is through this process that he understands and appreciates the value of these tools. “If I didn't have my own website and my work up online, I don't know how much work I'd be getting. It's definitely a lifeline, and it helps not be limited to geographic region to work on a project. (Schlarb, personal communication, April 2011)” Schlarb discussed how he experiments with different tools and platforms to see what works, if one doesn't seem to be used much then he will stop using it. As an independent artist he explains that if he can't maintain the page or keep things current, then he will get rid of the account.

## **Applications**

Schlarb has released two albums under his own name, often collaborating with many different artists to develop the unique sound he is after. For both albums he has partnered with the Asthmatic Kitty record label to produce and distribute his work. Owning his own home studio and having experience as a producer and engineer, Schlarb often handles most of that work on his own without having to hire outside talent or rent out a studio for those purposes. For his last album, Asthmatic Kitty helped cover the cost to hire the many musicians who collaborated with Schlarb on his record. They also provided some design services and promotional support for the CD and Digital release of the album through their already established network. This partnership allowed Schlarb to incur very little debt to Asthmatic Kitty and build off their network in cultivating a stronger community.

Wanting to release the album as a high quality vinyl record, he knew there would be significant up front costs in the pressing, printing, and shipping of the records. He decided to leverage his significant network and mailing lists cultivated over years of experience to conduct a pre-sale that would help to pay for the whole initial pressing. Investigating several successful approaches to Kickstarter, Schlarb set about creating an extensive list of incentives for the different pledge levels of his campaign that included, a copy of the album, limited edition silk screen posters and hand written sheet music for the higher donation levels. He even went as far as to write a hand written thank you note to almost everyone who pledged during the campaign which lasted only 30 days and exceeded his goal by several hundred dollars. His successful Kickstarter campaign allowed him to realize the full vision for his work while providing his most enthusiastic and invested fans a unique and personal experience with his art.

Schlarb says that he would not use Kickstarter for every project, as it runs the risk of

over extending his loyal patrons. If he constantly is tapping the same people for every project then “the well will run dry”. He respects these tools for their innovative applications in selling and distributing his work and views them all as one more opportunity to build a community and continue creating his art.

## RHYMESAYERS ENTERTAINMENT

### **History/Background**

Rhymesayers Entertainment is an independent record label with a large roster and wide sphere of influence specializing in independent hip hop music. The small staff of six oversees the production, promotion and distribution of over 20 artists that represent some of the biggest names in the independent hip hop field, including Atmosphere, Brother Ali, and Blueprint. Based out of Minneapolis, Minnesota the label has amassed a reputation over the last 16 years as one of the leaders in the national independent music scene.

The label opened its own record store in 1999 and it quickly became a physical hub for the vibrant independent music scene in the Twin Cities. Building off of the spirited and engaged regional music scene and years of extensive touring, the artists on RE's roster have built an expanding network of listeners, fans, and patrons. The label signed a promotion and distribution deal with Warner Music Group's Independent Label Group. Jake Schaefer, Director of Marketing and Promotions for Rhymesayers has leveraged that vast network through traditional promotional methods and an established extensive online presence.

### **Approach**

Rhymesayers Entertainment is a unique case in that they represent a hybrid model in distribution and much of the work of the promotion is not handled by the artists themselves. As an independent label with a small staff they are still taking advantage of many of the same tools and platforms available, while being responsible for managing many artists' communication strategies. Analyzing their approach to these tools and the strategies they employ is valuable to examine what can be accomplished with little support and resources.

The label utilizes a range of popular tools and platforms both to promote the label and

individual artists. Rhymesayers operates a website and blog that act as the informational hub for the label, a Facebook page, Twitter, Soundcloud, YouTube, and Bandcamp accounts. The label also manages individual artist Facebook pages and Twitter accounts to manage over all communication strategies across all of their platforms. Appreciating the importance of an authentic voice, each artist is able to control their own accounts, though some choose not to be as involved. The most freedom appears to be through Twitter in which artists have shown the most autonomy.

Schaefer spoke with me about the different strategies they employ when leveraging the strengths of each tool while understanding the usage patterns of fans and followers. First, he explains how they try to avoid constantly selling something or feeling like sales people. Having a balance of promotional content with behind-the-scenes engaging media prompts is important to this strategy. Their website acts as a comprehensive informational hub where interested consumers can go and get all of the news, tour and album information for the artists on the label, as well as a place to purchase music and merchandise. Their YouTube and Soundcloud accounts act as homes for posting their media content, including music videos and streaming audio. Their Facebook, Twitter, and social network accounts are then tools to encourage dialogue, post media, and engage their community of fans.

Schaefer has noticed that the Twitter followers are more mobile, often accessing their feeds on mobile devices. Understanding this, he uses this tool for quick and simple information updates, like tour updates and responding to followers. He strays away from linking to media within twitter as not many people are able or willing to link out to third party media sites on their mobile devices. There tends to be a good amount of back and forth, including responding to @ mentions and questions. Their voice is often more lighthearted and colloquial on Twitter.



Facebook has evolved to be the main promotional tool for the label. RE has found that Facebook's unique functions give the label the most options for starting conversations and sharing media. Being able to embed media directly into the user's Facebook feed has worked well for Rhymesayers in that followers don't need to leave the site to watch and share videos with their own networks. Often times the simple act of posting content initiates a steady stream of comments and encourages a conversation amongst the followers and the label or artists.

Rhymesayers realizes the potential of providing quality media content to its fans. Schaefer has noticed that fans have increasingly shortened attention spans and want content that requires little work on their own part. Often times short video updates or special tour footage is much more effective than text-heavy posts. They often create promotional videos that don't serve much more purpose than to entertain and build a buzz or excitement around an upcoming album or tour. This includes the Dr. Borka series which depicts the group Atmosphere visiting a group therapist and participating in team building exercises. This series aimed to promote the new Atmosphere album, *The Family Sign*, and emphasized the family relationship and dynamic within the group.

Extensive touring has helped the label and its artists build a strong physical network and community around their music. They have gone to great lengths to continue to develop that direct physical connection with their fans while encouraging that connection and engagement be translated online. Before almost every show, MC Slug of Atmosphere tries to shake hands and meet all of the people in line, providing fans with one-on-one interaction with their favorite artist. They often encourage concert goers to take photos at shows and post them to the label's Facebook page, tagging the artist or label. Rhymesayers will also create individual Facebook events for concerts, sending out invites to the show through those

networks. These practices help to create an emotional investment from the fans into what the label and artists are doing, while inviting them to continue that engagement online.

Leveraging this sense of community has allowed much of the promotional duties to fall on their fans. Though they do respond to and comment to questions posted on Facebook, they often let their fans moderate some of the redundant questions or false claims by detractors. This allows the label to get immediate feedback and opinions from the fans and followers. Schaefer says “We could be posting stuff all day every day, but it doesn't make sense. You sort of hit with your main things and follow up with a couple of other things and then just let it be what it is. You let other people raise awareness and start with random conversations (personal communication, April 2011).”

## Chapter 4 | Analysis

## **Introduction**

The proliferation of the Internet and web-based communication tools helped to expedite the dismantling of the traditional models by which music was produced, promoted, and distributed. As a result, independent music producers have taken advantage of many of those same web-based tools and emerging online social networks to try to redefine and rebuild a new era for the music industry. The cases I examined help to highlight ways in which independent artists are adapting traditional promotional methods for the Internet and creating new and innovative means of engaging their fans online.

The industry has changed dramatically and as a result, these platforms have provided an avenue for artists to communicate and connect directly with their audience. Unfortunately, it has also meant that many more artists also have the same tools at their disposal. I was interested in finding out ways that producers are breaking through the noise and constant chatter being produced across these networks and platforms. I have used these cases to highlight successful approaches to doing just that.

Tools constantly change and evolve; it's important not to focus solely on the tools that are being employed now, but the overall strategy and application for which they're being used. Social networks move in and out of fashion as they grow and become unwieldy. Facebook and Twitter will eventually be replaced by something else, something that fans will ultimately choose to adopt over these older tools. I want to highlight the successful strategies for engagement, dialogue, and conversation in order to understand how artists determine the strengths and weaknesses of each tool and use each in a unique way to leverage those strengths to build sustainable communities.

These are certainly not the only tools or options being explored by independent artists. They provide concrete examples of successful avenues for engaging an audience in the

promotion or distribution of an artist's work. I've outlined the overall themes I've found in analyzing these cases below.

### **Artist as Content Provider**

I've seen throughout these cases a move by artists towards the idea that they are not just musicians but story tellers and content providers. Fans have become more discerning with how they spend their money, yet they will be more engaged and eager to support artists they believe in. The fans no longer just want to buy an album, they want to go to a live show, get to know the artist and feel like they have some sort of personal connection with them. The artists are seeing that by taking advantage of many of these tools and platforms they are able to cultivate a much more engaged community of dedicated fans. Devon Leger emphasizes this point by saying, “There has never been a better time to build a sustainable business, but you have to know how the business works, or it won't work for you at all (personal communication, April 2011).” Another reasoning behind this shift is that though consumers have become more discerning, their attention spans have decreased. Artists are having to constantly update, post, and engage in order to keep their fans' attention while staying current and fresh. Geologic from Blue Scholars puts it this way, “It all goes back to content, it all goes back to 'are you delivering something that a potential audience out there will relate to or find interesting?' (personal communication, April 2011).”

Independent artists have begun to embrace the idea that they are in fact a brand. This is something that major labels and mainstream artists have accepted for some time. When major label artists were producing music videos, conducting million dollar marketing campaigns, and producing huge arena rock shows it was easy to see that their communications efforts should have a coordinated look and message. Traditionally,

independent artists took a much more organic approach, often limited by resources or relying on connections and favors in their decision making processes. Now that many of these same promotional methods are accessible to independent artists, they have begun to consider strategies for managing their message and brand, whether through logos and merchandise, promotional material, media content, or their communication messages.

Geologic talked to me about deciding to design and build the group's website after unsuccessful attempts with freelance designers, “It forced us to kind of do it all ourselves, which was a blessing in disguise, because it kept us plugged in on our own stuff and also hopping on Facebook, Twitter, and Tumblr (personal communication, April 2011).” Though it may be difficult to conduct many of these functions as an independent artist, Geologic points out the benefits of having more control of their message and more rich connection with their fans and their networks. Devon Leger, thinking about what these opportunities cost an independent artist, put it this way, “All the tools of the industry are available to anybody for either free, or dirt cheap...It is hard and does take a lot of work, but any business is hard and takes a lot of work (personal communication, April 2011).”

As Kusek explains, media has become easier and cheaper to produce over the last decade and this has provided a unique opportunity for independent artists to take advantage of the power of these resources than they ever had before (Kusek, 2005). The artists in these case studies have all used, what Henry Jenkins refers to as, original 's preadable media' productions, such as behind the scenes film clips, music videos, interviews, and streaming audio, to propel their message across multiple communication channels (Jenkins, 2009). Now a days, people can shoot high definition video from their smart phones, edit it and upload it on the web, all from the palm of their hands. The examples of these types of media products include posted videos of radio performances and the beat making process by the

Blue Scholars.

Rhymesayers constantly uploads tour update videos by their artists as well as promotional videos before an album release. Most recently, Rhymesayers has been posting “unboxing” videos, which are an internet trend of filming the unwrapping of a new package. These short videos help to highlight the original and quality packaging of their CDs and vinyl records. The key with producing media and other content is providing a range of options for consumers to engage with. Jake Schaefer of Rhymesayers Entertainment describes the value of these tools in his work, “Every second that they spend watching a video is a second of sales for the artists. The fact that they're watching it, means you're doing something right with your marketing (personal communication, April 2011).”

Production values have risen as prices have dropped for decent video and audio equipment. Artists are able to hire filmmakers rather inexpensively to produce high quality video content for them. Several of the artists in these cases expressed interest in producing a music video or short film for every song on their albums. Jake Schaefer of Rhymesayers Entertainment illustrated this importance:

Music videos are super important in the way you present [the music], because a lot of times it will be the user's first experience with the artist...The viral video is a little bit more of a fun, less serious, easier or accessible medium to engage somebody with, because they don't have to read anything...'here's TV essentially'. Its just super easy, they don't have to go anywhere, they just click it and they watch it. By making them funny, or clever...you can captivate and engage the user (personal communication, April 2011).

Documentation is a key theme throughout the content being posted and presented. Interested fans want to learn more about the artists and their processes. They want to feel like

they know the artist. That's why documenting your process is important in producing content, whether it is a video, Tweet, or blog post with images. Chris Schlarb discussed the importance of keeping your documentation and media content entertaining and engaging, "It's gotta be something interesting, something different, something special, if you just went about doing things over and over again, it would get boring (personal communication, April 2011)."

With this convergence of technologies and media, artists are often taking on many more roles themselves. It's possible to design and build your own WordPress website with little technical or design skills. This platform provides an easy content management system that is highly customizable yet easy to use; both for uploading and maintaining content and for updating your site and keeping it current. Artists have been producing and recording their albums in home studios for years, now they are beginning to take on more of the promotional roles and responsibilities that would be formerly handled by a team or a staff. This provides an incredible amount of freedom for artists to control their message and brand.

However, this can also provide a logistical nightmare for producers if they don't have the time or the skills to do things properly. They may come across looking amateur if the quality of the media does not appear to be what people are used to. Geologic mentioned the importance of having a professional looking package, "There's a lot of people putting out quality stuff out there. There's a lot of quality music; and it's good. It's well crafted, it sounds good, it's about something. At the same time there is a lot of bland presentation of great art, where as there is a lot of very distinct and memorable presentations of bad art (personal communication, April 2011)."

Henry Jenkins, in his book *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*, describes how the media industry is relying on committed consumers to spread media across their own networks (2006). Not only does this spreadable content and media help extend the



story of these artists' brands, but it provides a low “cost” way for fans to learn about the artists and their work. Jenkins, in his 3 part article “If It Doesn't Spread, It's Dead (Part Two): Sticky and Spreadable -- Two Paradigms”, explains this concept of spreadable content, “Spreadability as a concept describes how the properties of the media environment, texts, audiences, and business models work together to enable easy and widespread circulation of mutually meaningful content within a networked culture (Jenkins, 2009, Part 2, para. 8).”

The producers in my case studies have noticed that consumers, fans, and followers respond to content that requires little work or “cost” on their part to spread, yet is meaningful or significant to them in some way. Though making a media piece meaningful to a certain community may be the more involved process, producers can focus on making sure those media pieces they do create have very few barriers for spreading. Geologic highlights this point, “The less work you give them...if all that information is summed up and on the Facebook wall itself, or better yet if its something like audio or video that's streaming...that's the kind of stuff that we're more interested in (personal communication, April 2011).” A video or audio post is much more effective than a long text post for consumers with shrinking attention spans. When producing this content, it is crucial to embed the media directly into consumer's social media feeds rather than making them link out to 3<sup>rd</sup> party websites. Facebook offers a user friendly interface that allows the playing of videos directly on a news feed and easy sharing opportunities for it's users. Jake Schaefer spoke to me about making content easily accessible for users and fans:

We don't need to post the news post about the video, just post the video, giving the users the opportunity to interact with that content right away. The second you send people away to view the content, they get distracted. You never really want them to lose that focus. People who are using these tools don't often engage with them the way they

are supposed to. People are kind of lazy, you need to be as specific and short winded as possible and make it as easy as possible for them to use (personal communication, April 2011).

Jenkins again highlights the importance of creating meaningful content that values and respects the consumers choices and rejects a fixed or static form:

Spreadability relies on the one true intelligent agent -- the human mind -- to cut through the clutter of a hyper-mediated culture and to facilitate the flow of valuable content across a fragmented marketplace. Under these conditions, media which remains fixed in its location and static in its form fails to generate sufficient public interest and thus drops out of these ongoing conversations (Jenkins, 2009, Part 2, para.13).

Other content options that have proven effective for the cases I studied were the release of audio; either streaming through a player like Soundcloud or for free download. As noted by Sanjeev Dewan and Jui Ramaprasad in their paper, “Impact of Blogging on Music Sales: The Long Tail Effect”, music that is available for free sample online often leads to greater album sales (2007). Devon Leger suggests that artists post media on established platforms, not on their own custom developed players, “I always encourage artists to use established platforms...use something really simple...because if there is any delay between pushing play and hearing your music, you lost people right there (personal communication, April 2011).” By utilizing established platforms you ensure that your media loads quickly and is well supported, not having to rely on a web developer if your website's internal player goes down or loses support from a Web Browser. Chris Schlarb utilizes this method to great success, often offering whole albums as free streaming media. This has proved effective in providing an avenue for music that might not have seen a release in other forms, whether it is a film

score or unreleased album track.

Central to the idea of independent producers as content providers is the value of an authentic and consistent voice in artists' communications. Developing an authentic voice is something that producers struggle with in defining their brand and its online persona. Striking a balance between promotional and conversational messages is important. Devon Leger explains, "The audience wants to know who you are, they find out who you are by the content you provide, and if all of it is just self promotion, they will get tired of that (personal communication, April 2011)." Expanding on the idea of authenticity, Andrew Mall, in his research "What Would the Community Think: Communal Values in Independent Music", ultimately concludes that authenticity is derived from the accurate articulation of an audience or communities values (Mall, 2006). Artists should make sure they understand their audience and the tools and platforms they are using in order to be perceived fully as authentic and "real".

Devon Leger of Hearth Music explains "when you post something, it should be designed for that network (personal communication, April 2011)", highlighting that each network or platform has its own unique strengths and perceptions associated with it and its users. Using several different communications outlets helps build the artists brand, as each platform offers a distinct way to communicate, engage, and connect with an audience.

The artists I interviewed view Twitter to be a more lighthearted and casual place for communications, often including profanity and shorthand grammar in posts. Facebook, according to Jake Schaefer of Rhymesayers Entertainment, is a more conversational platform with a more straightforward tone. Most see the artist's website or blog to be a place with the most professional language and presentation, offering a place where users can get all of the detailed information they are seeking. Keeping a consistent voice in how these producers

approach each tool is important in defining a consistent brand and providing consumers with clear expectations of the content they are producing.

### **Consumer as Patron/Investor**

A theme that rang true throughout my interviews with my case studies is the way in which these producers think about and value the consumers of their work. Most of these producers viewed their fans and consumers as patrons or investors of their art. These are people who will support their endeavors without pause, simply because they want to know that they have helped play a part in the continuation of and proliferation of an artist's work. Jenkins highlights a conversation with the executives behind the Harry Potter series in which they describe the fans as “core stakeholders” in the property and the “life blood of the franchise” (Jenkins, 2005, Chapter 5, sec. 4, para. 14). This is a perfect example of how independent artists and producers should think about their fans.

Thinking about the consumer as a patron or investor alters the way in which artists should cultivate these devoted fans. Often, these patrons are much more emotionally invested in the work of the artists and feel a personal connection with them and their brand. Thinking about ways to engage and cultivate this audience group is important in ensuring continued support from the community growing around an artist or brand. Geologic from Blue Scholars describes ways how his group produce “real world” offerings of things that can't be digitized. This has been in the form of unique merchandise or limited edition packaging for albums and records.

A common guide in non-profit fundraising is the 80/20 rule, Chris Schlarb argues the same can be said about engaged patrons, where 20% of an artist's fans are deeply committed and engaged with their content, while the other 80% are passive followers. This committed

devotion often manifests itself in “liking” or sharing of content on their social networks or promoting the producer's work without prompts. This ratio also seems to be a good guide for considering the amount of people who consistently support an artist via ticket, album, and merchandise sales. Schlarb talks about his approach to cultivating a dedicated community of patrons, “Its not how big the network is, but the quality of those people in it. One of the ways you get quality people is you treat them with respect, you're polite, you're honest, giving and sincere (personal communication, April 2011).” Henry Jenkins, in his article “If It Doesn't Spread, It's Dead (Part Three): The Gift Economy and Commodity Culture”, describes the consumer buy-in and investment into the cultural economy surrounding an artist, “Consumers do not simply consume; they recommend content they like to their friends who recommend it to their friends who recommend it on down the line. They do not simply "buy" cultural goods; they "buy into" a cultural economy which respects and rewards their participation. Nothing spreads widely in the new digital economy unless it engages and serves the interests of both consumers and producers (Jenkins, 2009, Part 3, para. 2).”

Not only can this mentality lead to a more invested fan base, it can lead to a sustained advocate network. Devon Leger of Hearth Music describes how artists should interact with their followers in that their promotional messages should come from the ground up. He also suggested that once artists find the people that are really into their work, that artists ask for their help. Giving opportunities to consumers who want a more engaged and personal experience can encourage them to become outspoken advocates for an artist and their work, without explicitly asking them. Sometimes this can be as simple as prompting your followers with a question on Twitter, like in Blue Scholars' case, when they asked followers on Twitter for film suggestions to inspire their new album, *Cinemetropolis*. Other times, this engagement has been more organic and evolved from listening to fans and responding to their

questions or cues. Jake Schaefer, from Rhymesayers Entertainment, suggests that artists let others do the promotion for them. If you give fans the tools to share content, then they will support and share that content through their networks, simply because they want to support and promote something they like and are invested in.

Henry Jenkins, perfectly highlights this focus on the consumer and this nascent approach to media production and promotion:

In this emerging model, consumers play an active role in "spreading" content rather than being the passive carriers of viral media: their choices, their investments, their actions determine what gets valued in the new mediascape. Recentring the discussion on choices consumers make, rather than choices media companies make, forces advertising and entertainment companies to pay closer attention to consumer's motivations and thus to design content which better aligns with their interests; it will also allow companies to adopt policies which sustain rather than repress this desire to help circulate relevant material throughout their social networks (Jenkins, 2009, Part 2, para. 8).

Chris Schlarb ascribes to the philosophy that people are more apt to share content if they feel like they discovered it, suggesting that it must be an organic process and not something artists push for. The producers need to create the environment and community that supports a network of patron promoters and taps into what makes fan networks tick. Schlarb explains that he likes to give something back to his supporters, often in the form of free downloads or exclusive content. Schlarb describes his approach as one that is based in respect:

If you subscribe to the idea that you are your brand, then you don't have to do that, you don't have to say 'hey look at me!'. People are already looking at you, they're following

you and paying attention to you. You don't need to remind them every five minutes that they need to do something for you...I feel like there has to be an inherent respect for your audience, for their intellect, their time, and their money. You have to give them something back so that they feel like 'I'm happy to do this, and I would do it again. It has to be a sustainable process and a sustainable relationship (personal communication, April 2011).

One significant way in which independent artists are cultivating a strong pool of patron promoters is to ask them to literally invest in their work, through a platform like Kickstarter.com. Kickstarter offers artists a unique and flexible way of soliciting donations and investments to support specific projects for which they need money. The Kickstarter system allows artists to create a fundraising campaign project website with many common web-based tools for social interaction and promotion built in to the system. Independent artists have been using the site to fund the production and recording of new records, the pressing and promotion of an album, or specific limited edition releases. Often the fundraising goals are relatively low, only a few thousand dollars, to ensure that they are met.

Chris Schlarb recently created a Kickstarter campaign to fund the limited edition pressing of his latest album on vinyl record, only asking for \$4,000. The Blue Scholars established a much higher-stakes campaign, seeking \$25,000 for the pressing and promotion of their album on CD and vinyl record. The campaign was so successful that they raised over \$65,000 in just 45 days. These examples of successful Kickstarter campaigns took advantage of the platform's unique opportunities to engage a relatively small but impassioned pool of patrons willing to go out of their way to support the project and the group or artist. This phenomenon is highlighted well in Wendel's exploration of Radiohead's *In Rainbows* album release (2008). Though fans were given the option to download the album for free or to “pay

what they wanted”, fans overwhelmingly paid an average of five dollars, showing that though it was free they still wanted to support the group.

Some of the strengths of the Kickstarter system is its inclusion of many of the core functions of effective social media networks, including a blog feature, media embeds, and sharing capabilities to other networks. Successful Kickstarter campaigns often cleverly and effectively use media to promote and engage their patrons and prospective donors. The main way artists use this function is through a promotional video, which can summarize the project or introduce the patron to the artist. Once patrons have decided to support the project, these “super fans” can become literally invested advocates for the project and the artist. Geologic from Blue Scholars discusses how users want to be a part of something that succeeds, “Its just simple, and they get something out of it, you make people feel like they helped make it happen (personal communication, April 2011).” Often times, as in other more traditional fundraising campaigns, people wait until the deadline is approaching to make sure that the project will meet its goal. Once they've seen that enough people are supporting the project and it will succeed, they invest as well, sometimes feeling like they were the ones that “put it over the edge” acting as a “hero investor”. The all or nothing model from Kickstarter does help to alleviate some of the risk for patrons, knowing that if the goal is not met, they won't be charged for their pledge.

Of course, getting people to actually donate is the biggest challenge for a fundraising method of this kind. Kickstarter provides a tiered pledging system where producers are able to designate donation levels and incentives or rewards for each pledge amount. Incentives, like in the case of the Blue Scholars' *Cinemetropolis* campaign, can range from a thank you mention on Twitter, to limited edition custom album packaging, and tickets to a VIP release party. Incentives are a key aspect in getting patrons to pledge at higher levels. Chris Schlarb



discussed how he approaches developing these incentives and rewards, “Well if someone was asking me to pay 50 bucks, I'd say 'I better get some cool stuff'. I tried to make the rewards really substantial (personal communication, April 2011).” The producer needs to carefully calculate which incentives he or she provides, because though they may entice a larger donation, they can also end up not being cost effective. Geologic from Blue Scholars spoke about carefully “crunching the numbers” to calculate the right cost and benefit relationship when determining incentive rewards (Geologic, personal communication, April 2011). Even though the cost of many of the nicer limited edition package incentives were kept high to ensure a high quality product, the revenue from that pledge level was still almost double than from a traditional album sale.

The compensation model employed by my case studies in starting Kickstarter campaigns is an evolution of the traditional “pre-sale” or “pre-order”. Independent artists have in the past taken advantage of selling pre-orders of their records to pay for some of the expenses of printing and pressing a new record. Rather than having to press thousands of records and working tirelessly to sell them and recoup their money, artists can take care of the up-front costs without having to take out much debt. The Kickstarter campaigns adopted this same model by raising “pledges” that would make sure the donor gets an album, but also help cover the costs of pressing more records.

The artists I interviewed for this project all believe that some level of transparency was necessary in succeeding with their Kickstarter projects. Blue Scholars provided a rough outline of how they would spend the money they raised and what costs were associated with the pressing of the album. However, Schlarb chose to be completely transparent in this process, providing a detailed budget for how he planned to spend every dollar. This is a significant shift from traditional methods of distribution and compensation for artists. Rarely

does a musician or group give you detailed accounts of how they plan on spending their revenue or how much it cost to produce an album. This simple action goes a long way to showing your patrons respect.

Yochai Benkler, in his book *The Wealth of Networks*, explains that market-driven activities like that of a producer or “brand” must be strategic (Benkler, 2006, p. 291). Producers need to make a strategic decision as to how and when they want to be transparent in their actions. The informed and engaged consumer today is much more discerning with how they spend their money, especially in supporting an artist through this kind of platform, they want to know if the artists have a plan. The nature of the Kickstarter model presents a form of transparency in that if an artist does not have a proper plan for the raised funds, then consumers will not want to fund that project.

Of course, embracing the notion of consumers as patrons and investors does come with some challenges. If you are only tapping 20% of your consumer base as patrons you may begin to burn them out. If an artist chooses to follow these fundraising methods in every situation, they will most certainly begin to saturate the market with requests, tapping out the resources at their disposal. Patrons will tire of and potentially resent an artist for constantly seeking this level of commitment and investment from the same group of people. There should be a balance of resources for projects that seek this level of investment. The artists should continually be cultivating new fans into patrons, by building an engaging and sustainable relationship with their community.

### **Building Strong Relationships and Sustainable Communities**

In many ways the concept of independent scenes has not changed, like Kruse explores in her book *Site and Sound: Understanding Independent Music Scenes*, independent music

scenes develop and expand from a strong connection to community and often a physical place. This connection to a community and to physical or “real world” experiences plays heavily in my research of online promotional strategies for independent artists (2003). Kruse defines these spaces and communities as “social interaction zones”, zones that surround a particular community, venue, or group (2003). This can manifest as an online community via social networks or a strong regional community of artists and fans that support a local scene of live performances.

Some of the cases like Rhymesayers and Blue Scholars come from strong independent music scenes in their respective cities and regions, Twin Cities and the Pacific Northwest respectively. However, Chris Schlarb and many of the folk artists that Hearth Music represents do not necessarily have a strong physical community from which they've emerged, often finding pockets of interest around the country. All of the case studies have found that a strong online presence can build virtual networks of supporters from around the country and the world. Schlarb often credits this for an increase in work both as a producer and composer, “That is definitely a lifeline. It helps not to be limited to a geographic region to work on projects (personal communication, April 2011).”

Creating a sustainable community comes from providing engaging content that connects directly to patrons and their interests; forming a wide network of strong personal relationships. The artists I interviewed for this research employ a variety of techniques, like concentrated communication strategies and 'real world' offerings, to build those relationships through their web-based networks and platforms. In one of the studies that Jenkins looked at for his book, Albert M. Muniz Jr. and Thomas C O'Guinn state that, “Brand communities carry out important functions on behalf of the brand, such as sharing information, perpetuating the history and culture of the brand, and providing assistance...They provide

social structure to the relationship between marketers and consumers.” (Jenkins, 2006, Chapter 2, Section 4, para. 1). This idea helps to highlight how sharable engaging content can help to build a strong relationship between the producer and consumer.

The most effective community builders from my cases adopted carefully considered communication strategies which balance the amount of promotional messages and frequency of posts on their various online social networks. Devon Leger recommends that only 20% of artists' messages on their social networks, like Twitter, should be self promotional in nature, while Jake Schaefer is comfortable with somewhere closer to 50%. These decisions should be considered individually and should be consistent with a group's brand or persona. The amount of posts by each of these artists per week varied significantly, but I would say that the average was around 3-5 posts a week on Facebook. These strategies require periodic assessment or weekly strategy sessions and should be continually revised to maximize reach and avoid stagnation, especially during large promotional campaigns like an album release or Kickstarter campaign. It is important for producers to be consistent in their strategy and message, but also keep a certain amount of fluidity to avoid becoming stagnant and just part of 'the noise'.

Through these carefully planned strategies, the producers are able to create a dialogue around their content or offer eager fans a more personal way of engaging in their work and their process. Blue Scholars used this approach when choosing their latest merchandise designs. After posting several design proofs on their Facebook page, they asked their fans to choose the one they liked the most and to give a reason why. The design with the most votes got produced and the fan with the best answer received a free T-shirt. Other artists give away free concert tickets or ask for feedback about a new or potential project plan. This online engagement can then produce tangible products or experiences that help to reinforce that

mutually supportive relationship. Chris Schlarb even went so far as to include a hand written note to fans who purchased his last album, thanking them for supporting his work and asking them to write back to let him know how they liked the album.

Many times artists rely on a physical network of support to sustain and supplement the virtual community that emerges from these real-world experiences. Live performances have long been the main source of income for music producers. They act as exciting and tangible ways for patrons to experience the music and make lasting memories of the performance, which in turn creates an emotional connection with the musicians and their brand.

Rhymesayers artist Slug of Atmosphere, hangs out before shows and walks the line outside the building, shaking hands and taking pictures with everyone one who wants to. The fans are then encouraged to post the photos on the artist's Facebook page or tag them with the artist's name. Not only does this give everyone in the crowd a unique personal experience, it invites the fan to share that experience with all of their friends on their own online networks.

Rhymesayers and Blue Scholars have promoted and encouraged fans to take pictures or video and upload them to a specific flickr account. Those pictures are then posted throughout the artists' social networks, creating a crowd sourced media slideshow that fans can feel like they had a part in creating. They are able to feel like they played a part in supporting the group.

Most artists are lucky enough to have the reinforcement of a regional 'scene' or community of like minded supporters. Often this is a small team of collaborators or even similar artists that perform together. The producers I studied all actively leveraged these communities of collaborators to enhance or support their online promotional efforts. These collaborators could include the producers and engineers that helped produce the album or the designers, photographers, and filmmakers that helped promote an album or song. In the case of the Blue Scholars, they held a special event in which they invited all of their local

supporters, collaborators, and dedicated fans, to promote the launch of their Kickstarter campaign. Those few dedicated and invested people become as Geologic says “the field generals and first line of advocates in promoting the project through their online networks (personal communication, April 2011).” This is a prime example of using physical networks and communities to take advantage of the 'viral' properties of the internet. Geologic continues, “Its one thing to interact with them, answer e-mails, answer questions, go back and forth on the social media, but its another thing to actually go where they are. You actually go there and tell them in person...(personal communication, April 2011)”

Sometimes these online tools can actually help to build your community of collaborators. In Schlarb's and Blue Scholars' case this community of collaborators emerged from their own online network and fans. Schlarb has been commissioned numerous times through his website, e-mail or social networks like Twitter. Blue Scholars spoke to me about a collaborative relationship that emerged after a fan contacted them about directing a music video for one of their songs. They agreed to the deal both as a way of producing new content, of and for the fans, but to help this particular fan build a name for himself. Now, they have planned to collaborate on several new film projects. This collective collaboration is a prime example of how being open and engaging with an online network can lead to a real and meaningful collaborative community.

Independent producers struggle to translate their online followers into physical fans at shows or actual purchases of their products. Blue Scholars explained how after they perform a good show, their online Facebook followers count jumps by 50 to 100 people. Rhymesayers and Schlarb also create individual Facebook events for their live shows or tours, this way the artist or producer can track how attendance is looking and invite people individually to the shows. Not only does this highlight the uniting and connecting power of the internet across

large geographic areas, but also how direct online engagement can get people on the ground at shows. Geologic from the Blue Scholars describes their approach to online activity:

We approach the whole online thing with a sense of balance, our online game needs to be tight in order to maximize when we do shows and our live performances have to be on point if people are going to talk about us, if they're going to hop on the web later on and talk about us (personal communication, April 2011).

The independent artists and producers in my study employ various techniques to cultivate and expand their online networks to create sustainable and invested communities. Creating current and expansive mailing lists is a good way of maintaining an online network and developing new connections. Devon Leger suggested several ways artists can build that list, making sure to consolidate from various sources. Artists should make sure to connect with people after every online interaction, whether its a merchandise or record purchase or a free song download. Bandcamp is a great tool for releasing individual or full albums for download, either for a price or for free. The Bandcamp.com system is set up so that in order to get the download link, the consumer must first provide their e-mail address. Devon Leger of Hearth Music spoke about his general strategic approach to online promotions:

The key to all of this is that everything needs to feed into and support the center of the business, and for me that's our website, Everything else I do drives people back to the website, I write blogs and I link to the central website, I write Twitter and Facebook posts that all drive back to the center. Thats the only way to make the web sustainable, if you put all your eggs in one basket on Facebook or Twitter, you're not going to survive when those networks start collapsing. You're not going to be able to build up a new social network from an old social network like Myspace (personal communication, April 2011).

Often artists grow their networks by following other artists and their patrons. Making a habit of following people that follow you, gives you the largest possible fans base from which to cultivate these patron promoters. Having a strong central hub and prevalent mailing list sign-ups is key to maintaining your connections in the event that a social network begins to dissolve. There is no real way of rebuilding your network. This was what Devon Leger and Blue Scholars discussed surrounding the demise of Myspace, there was no way for retaining those followers and having them continue to engage in your work through newly developed social networking platforms. That's why it's important to offer several ways for fans to follow, engage, and support an artist's work not entirely based in one platform or tool.

### **Experimentation**

An essential theme that is present in the approach of all the producers I interviewed has been a deep embrace for exploration and experimentation when it comes to the adoption and facilitation of social media networks and web-based tools for promotion and distribution. Having a healthy degree of adaptability keeps artists flexible in this ever evolving landscape of new tools and platforms. Geologic sums this up, saying "My approach is to 'experiment, experiment, experiment'. We're going to be the generation that makes a bunch of mistakes and innovations and the next generation is gonna learn from (personal communication, April 2011)." Devon Leger also talked with me about the adaptability of artists, "If they can move fast, think quickly, and adapt easily, then they could really make money, make a living and make some good friends (personal communication, April 2011)."

Keeping an open mind is important in the use of online social media and web-based tools. Successful employers of these tools constantly have their "ear to the ground" as Geologic explains, "A lot of times you have to go where your people are (personal



communication, April 2011).” Explaining the importance of following your audience, Geologic spoke about listening to his fans and heeding their advice in adopting new tools and online social network platforms. Listening to and getting to know your audience is important as Geologic points out, “We have been forced to see who are the people that are most willing to comment on something, who are the most willing to repost something and share it with their friends, it's obvious that its the young fans (personal communication, April 2011).” Not only is this important in order to keep the artists relevant, its a great way to stay connected with your fans no matter where they move across platforms. It is important to listen to your fans and give them what they are looking for in engagement and participatory opportunities.

Part of embracing experimentation and a certain level of fluidity is being comfortable with failure. Often times many of the projects that artists attempt do not end as planned. Geo from the Blue Scholars discussed how the group adopted Twitter in its infancy, only to find that not many people were using the platform. They gave up on using Twitter because it was a waste of resources at the time, but returned to the platform a year later once it became more widely adopted by people all over the Web. The proper response to this type of unsuccessful exploration is adaptation and flexibility. If the Blue Scholars had just given up on Twitter, they might not have come back to the platform to take advantage of the platforms wide appeal in reaching their fans.

## **Conclusion**

There is no one blanket solution, no right tool or strategy that will adequately address every producer's situation or concerns. Independent artists and producers ultimately need to approach each tool or platform with thought towards how it will solve their unique issues. I'm hoping that independent producers can look to these cases and my research as a guide for

developing their promotional and distribution plans. Independent producers ultimately need to take advantage of the opportunities that being an independent artist provides; a high level of flexibility, the ability to develop direct relationships, and the possibility to cultivate sustainable networks and communities. Artists should use the themes I've highlighted in my analysis as ways to address their individual situations and to develop a unique and highly effective strategy for promoting and distributing their work through web-based tools and online social networking platforms. Producers should identify clear goals for their communications strategies while maintaining a high level of flexibility in order to successfully connect with their fans and followers. They should leverage the strengths of various tools and platforms to effectively engage with and develop dedicated networks into invested communities of passionate patrons.

## Chapter 5 | Conclusions and Recommendations

## **Examine the Field**

My research examined the ways in which independent music producers are utilizing web-based tools for the promotion and distribution of their work. Adapting to and redefining the music industry, these producers use online social networking platforms and internet based tools to communicate and engage with their supporters, creating and developing a sustained community of dedicated patron promoters. I explored a variety of literature to help define the history and implications of the current environment for web-based promotion for independent artists. I focused on four cases that exemplified various aspects of the field and highlighted effective tools and successful strategies for making direct connections to break through the noise. These strategies as laid out in my Analysis not only act as a guide for future independent music producers but for any producer of content looking to explore the Internet and online social media tools for promoting and distributing their work. I've extended these strategies to consider more broadly how emerging Arts Administrators and Media Managers can utilize the same techniques in developing strong relationships and building sustainable communities.

In my research I looked at several cases that best represented different aspects of the independent music scene but also the different levels of support and resources with which producers are creating, promoting, and distributing their work. The Blue Scholars are an independent hip hop group based out of Seattle, they are producers that have been around for some time and have continually explored new ways of distribution and promotion. Hearth Music is an artist promotion agency that specializes in Folk, Roots, and Americana music. Devon Leger, the founder, provides support and guidance for emerging independent Folk artists using the Internet to further their goals and desires. Rhymesayers Entertainment is a mid-size independent hip hop record label that promotes and distributes over 20 artists and

producers. Though the staff is not very large, they certainly represent a producer with many more resources at their disposal in developing promotional materials and strategies. Chris Schlarb, on the other hand, is an independent artist from Long Beach, California who does everything himself. Truly independent, Schlarb embraces the DIY aesthetic in most of his endeavors including the use and adoption of social networking platforms and web-based distribution strategies.

These artists provide clear examples of independent producers' approaches to the facilitation of internet based strategies and tools in the promotion and distribution of their work. While also working to highlight common themes that translate more generally to Arts Administrators and Media Managers in today's ever changing media landscape.

### **Be More Than Just Your Work**

In his book, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*, Henry Jenkins describes “convergence culture” as the emerging state of web-based promotions that have begun to require savvy Arts Administrators to not only embrace but also master the use of multiple media in delivering their messages (2006). Whether in a small community arts non-profit organization or a world renowned museum or cultural institution, producers and marketers need to realize that they are much more than just the work they do on paper. They are in fact a brand and as such need to think about ways to promote and expand their mission through all of the available tools, platforms and avenues for communicating directly with their constituents.

With the proliferation of cheap tools and software for the production and creation of quality media, Arts Administrators should think about ways of incorporating this types of content into their promotional communications. Whether it is a short video, images, or well

written blog post, Arts Administrators can use these tools to document their work, publicize exciting aspects of their programming, or provide detailed information for their audience or constituents.

With origins in a slow economy, the transparency afforded by the Internet today makes consumers and audiences much more discerning in how they spend their money and their time on the Web. If Arts Managers can think of themselves and their organizations as a brand, with a coordinated message and story, they would be more willing to see the value in becoming content providers. Audiences and consumers want to consume content and media that allows them to explore or engage more fully with the organization or brand. Providing that content in easily shareable media formats allows for an organic dissemination of an artist's message across various networks that they might not have had access to otherwise. The easier it is for a constituent to “like” and share the media, the more likely those engaged fans are to promote your organization. Geologic from Blue Scholars explains how fans want a low-cost option when consuming media, especially through various popular online social media networks like Facebook and Twitter.

It is clear from my analysis of these cases that Arts Administrators need to understand the strengths, weaknesses, and unique circumstances around individual social networking platforms and social media outlets. Understanding these tools and how to utilize them for their own purposes and situations is important in developing a clear voice or persona for each platform and scenario. This should be a consistent voice that is able to fit into the dialogue and conversations within these networks and platforms. Not only is consistency and specificity important in developing the voice of your organization, but authenticity is also a key ingredient in actively connecting with your constituents. The literature and my cases explain that being authentic comes not only from treating your constituents with respect, but

actively trying to understand their needs and wants. Understanding their language and what they want out of engagement with your organization or brand is invaluable in having a successful experience.

### **Cultivating Investment**

Though Arts Administrators and Media Managers have long thought about their constituents as investors, this idea is somewhat novel for independent music producers on the Web. These independent artists and producers offer innovative tools and strategies for cultivating a community of committed patron promoters. In many ways the mentality is similar to how non-profit organizations approach cultivation and development of a dedicated donor base. The producers I interviewed for this research use an approach that says that about 20% of their fans will be the ones most involved and invested, both emotionally and financially.

The Internet has provided several new ways for creative industry professionals are to raise funds for specific projects. Several cases that I looked at utilized the Kickstarter platform to raise donations or investments for an artist's work. Kickstarter is an Internet platform that allows anyone to create a fundraising campaign to solicit donations for a specific project or goal. The unique feature about Kickstarter is that it allows users to pledge a certain amount of money with the guarantee that if the project does not reach its fundraising goal, no one gets charged for their donation, ensuring only successfully proven projects get funded. This platform allows the creator of the project to leverage readily accessible social networking and social media tools to increase awareness and promote the fundraising campaign and its benefitting project. These tools include share functions, media embeds, and an in-site blogging feature to keep donors updated with the progress of the campaign. Of course, these tools and functions should be used in conjunction with other social networking actions that

reward committed patrons and entice them to not only continue supporting but to actively promote through their own networks.

The Kickstarter model offers a variety of strategies and opportunities that traditional fundraising methods can not provide. The artists I interviewed utilized this model as a way to cover up-front costs for a specific project, whether it was the printing and pressing of a record or the production of a music video. Arts Administrators can debate using this technique to avoid accruing significant debt in producing an upcoming project, exhibition, or performance. Another way in which independent producers are finding success when developing their projects is to offer a tiered system of incentives or rewards for donating at different levels. The most successful projects offered a wide range of tangible and meaningful rewards designed to encourage larger donations and give the donor a direct connection with the group or project.

Transparency is important when considering the medium of the Internet and the expectations of its users and artists' constituents. The successful Kickstarter projects I researched all offered a great degree of transparency into how they were going to spend the funds from the campaign. This not only reassures your donors that they are supporting a successful endeavor, but again shows a great deal of respect for the supporters.

Ultimately Arts Administrators are using these tools to cultivate a dedicated community of patron promoters. These advocates are emotionally and financially invested in the project or organization and have a sense of ownership and a vested interest in the continued existence of the project or organization. They don't necessarily see it as investing or donating but as supporting their favorite group. They become engaged by being offered relatable content with the hopes of starting a conversation or dialogue between the producer and consumer. Understanding your patrons and giving them something in return goes a long way in cultivating those interests.



### **Making Connections**

The most important suggestion for sustaining your online networks is to have a carefully crafted communications strategy with a thoughtful and consistent approach to messages and posts. The artists I studied had regular, if not weekly, strategy sessions where they would plan out how many posts would go out each day or week on their various online social networks and the goals and messages behind each post. On average, it appeared that 3-5 posts a week on Facebook was adequate, with a more steady stream following on Twitter. This will inevitably vary per situation and from week to week, but it is important for Arts and Media Managers to continually reassess these strategies, especially when it comes to large promotional pushes and marketing campaigns. By now, we realize the time commitment that social media interaction can become. If an artists does not have a plan to how they expect to use these tools for their project or organization then they are certainly wasting time.

In order to build strong and sustainable relationships with their constituents, Arts Administrators should utilize these social media and networking tools to make direct connections with their fans and followers. These tools should be used to start conversations, and to engage in dialogue; less as a straight promotional tool. The musician Chris Schlarb who I interviewed suggested that he does not think about these tools as promotional mediums but as another way for his fans to get to know him and feel like they have a direct and personal connection with him. Though, this may be a more utopian, or even naïve, approach to working these tools, Arts and Media Managers should think about ways to prompt their followers into conversations. The balance between promotional posts and more conversational posts for my cases ranged from 20% to 50%, but all the artists and producers realized that constant self promotional messages wear fans out.

There are many ways that Arts and Media Managers can utilize these tools to make

connections and invite the most dedicated fans to engage further with their project or organization. Independent music producers are using contests or simple prompts to start dialogue with their fans and followers, often times creating tangible experiences to allow deeper more personal connections with their work. Arts Administrators can look to these examples as ways of creating tangible experiences and connections, forming a lasting relationship with their most dedicated supporters. These experiences can include contests for VIP tickets to “meet the artist”, or special promotional and product giveaways. Providing these tangible experiences not only helps develop direct personal connections with online followers but goes a long way to creating committed patron promoters that will continue to support and advocate for your organization, ultimately growing your network.

One of the ways that the independent producers in my research developed their networks was taking advantage of their existing networks, both physical and virtual. I discussed how artists would leverage their relationships with other similar artists and musical collaborators to help promote and share everyone's work. Arts Administrators should view every opportunity to collaborate or create partnerships as just another way to develop their network. Working with partners or sponsors often has the effect of opening up an organizations members to new networks and vice versa. A strong mutually supportive relationship and collaboration can go a long way to building a strong physical community and also towards making your audience feel like they are part of a larger online community.

As stated in my research, Devon Leger of Hearth Music talks about the importance of building a sustainable network. His artists make a point of connecting with their consumers after every online interaction so that they don't just buy an album and go home, but their information is cultivated or they are at least invited to participate in other ways. Arts Administrators should look to different means of building a sustainable network or

community. Its important not to silo an artist's online social networks but to invite interactions across networks or guide communications towards a central hub. This way when one social networking platform eventually dissolves, your followers will know where to find you.

### **Fluid and Adaptable**

Geologic discusses his approach to utilizing these tools and platforms, “My approach is to 'experiment, experiment, experiment'. We're going to be the generation that makes a bunch of mistakes and innovations and the next generation is gonna learn from (personal communication, April 2011).” This idea of experimentation and a sense of adaptability is extremely important for anyone trying to stay at the cutting edge of this ever evolving media landscape. Its important for Arts Administrators to cultivate an institutional culture that embraces this idea of experimentation and exploration when it comes to social media and online networking. The producers in my study all participated in various social networks and took cues from friends, fans, and people they follow as to what tools to adopt next. As tools evolve and constituents migrate between platforms, the arts organizations or projects should devote a portion of their resources to exploring new platforms and technology in order to maximize their influence, potentially reaching new constituents that were not a part of other platforms.

Of course these approaches do not come without risk. When the Blue Scholars first adopted Twitter, it was a failed experiment. There was no one using the platform or they did not entirely understand the strengths of the platform, only to come back two years later and use the platform to great success. Arts Administrators need to be adaptable, fluid, and accepting of failure. Arts and Media Managers should not be afraid to try new platforms or to

abandon failed attempts. Its important to keep an “ear to the ground” and as Devon Leger says, “If they can move fast, think quickly, and adapt easily, then they could really make money, make a living and make some good friends (personal communication, April 2011).”

### **Wrap Up**

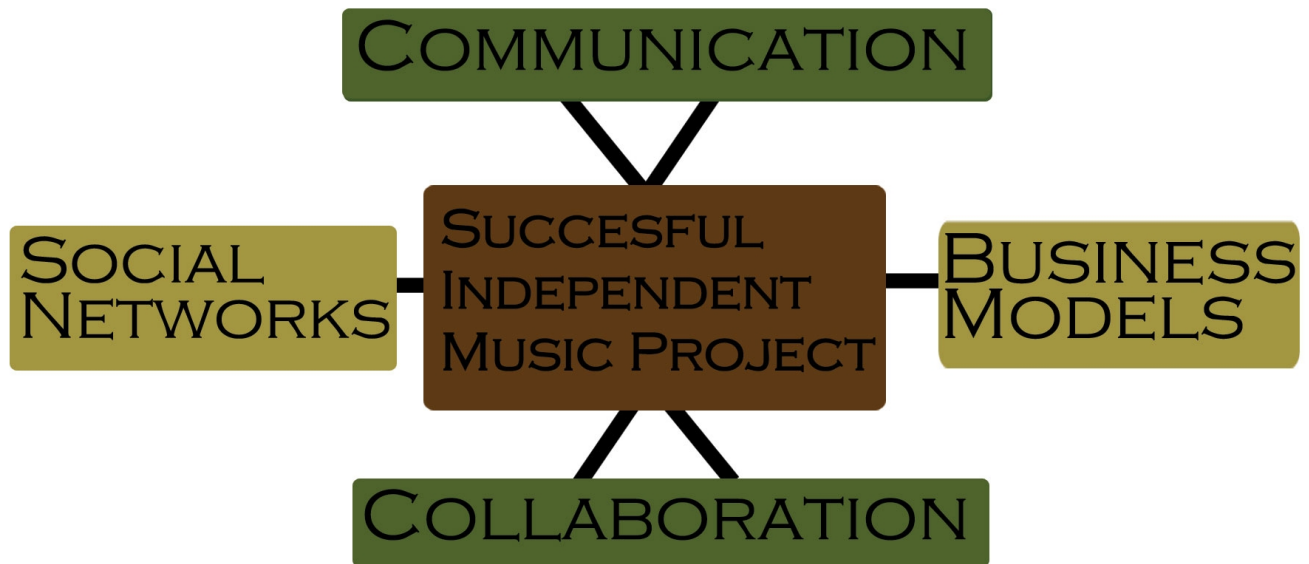
For all of the cases I examined in my research, there is no one right solution or strategy to utilizing these tools for promotion and distribution. What is important to recognize is the flexibility that these independent producers employ in their approach to adopting theses tools and the fluidity that these platforms and tools provide for unique and individual solutions. Arts Administrators and Media Managers should learn from these cases and apply the themes, strategies, and tools laid out in my research to their projects and organizations. Arts and Media Managers should think about ways of expanding their communication messages through spreadable media content that not only engages fans but prompts a community of patron promoters. Offering ways for these dedicated constituents to further engage and invest in their project or organization helps to cultivate a sustained community of committed supporters built from strong personal relationships through online interaction. Arts Administrators and Media Managers also need to embrace the evolving and experimental nature of online promotion and distribution in order to leverage the strengths and weakness of the tools and platforms at their disposal to further the mission of their organizations.

## Appendices

### Appendix A:

CONSUMER

DIGITAL



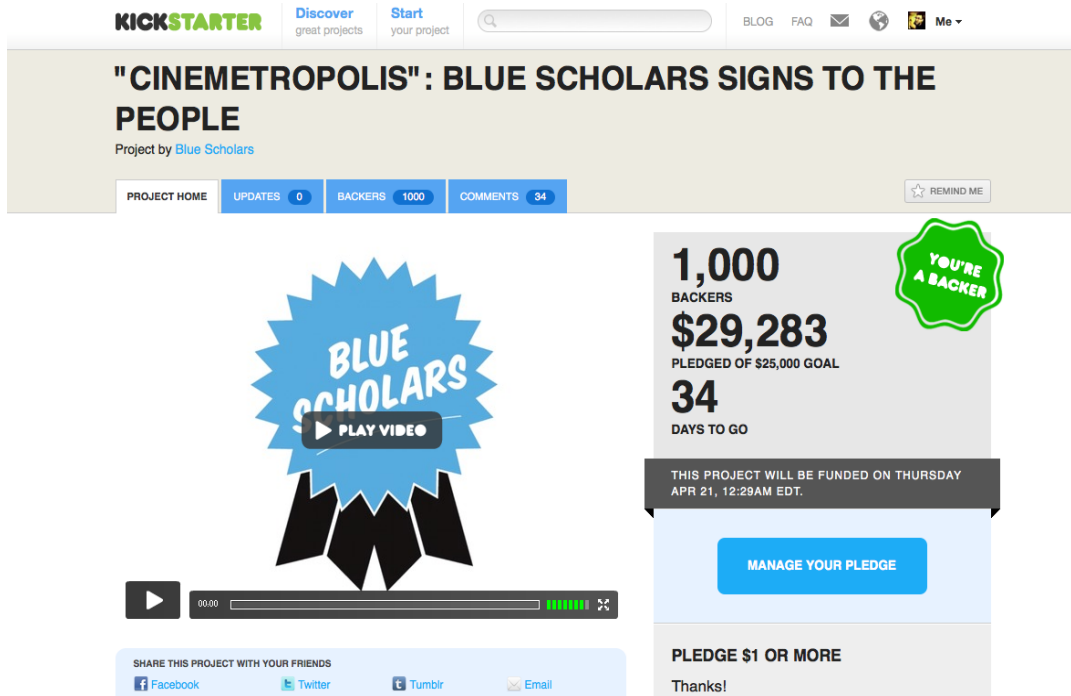
PHYSICAL

PRODUCER

Conceptual Framework for research

## Appendix B:

Examples of the Blue Scholars' Kickstarter campaign for their album *Cinemetropolis*.



Kickstarter Campaign Website  
March 19, 2011



Kickstarter Campaign Website  
April 15, 2011

## Appendix B (Continued):

**KICKSTARTER** Discover great projects Start your project

BLOG FAQ

Me

# "CINEMETROPOLIS": BLUE SCHOLARS SIGNS TO THE PEOPLE

A Music project in Seattle, WA by Blue Scholars • [send message](#)

PROJECT HOME UPDATES 2 BACKERS 2243 COMMENTS 71



Like

Tomas Alfredo Valladares and 3,849 others like this.

Tweet

EMBED

<http://kck.st/hcKSJS>

**ABOUT THIS PROJECT**

***CINEMETROPOLIS* is coming. And we're bringing it back home.**

After weighing all options for the release of our third full-length studio album, *Cinemetropolis*, we've decided to forego all traditional channels and return to the independent approach that made Blue Scholars who we are. No

2,243  
BACKERS

**\$62,391**  
PLEDGED OF \$25,000 GOAL

**0**  
SECONDS TO GO

**YOU'RE A BACKER**

**FUNDING SUCCESSFUL**

This project successfully raised its funding goal on April 22.

**PLEDGE \$1 OR MORE**

Thanks!

10 BACKERS

**PLEDGE \$5 OR MORE**

Blue Scholars (@bluescholars) shouts you out on Twitter!

13 BACKERS • Survey sent 04/25/11

Final Successful Kickstarter Campaign  
April 22, 2011

## Examples of the Blue Scholars' Social Networking Websites

# BLUE SCHOLARS



HOME BIO SHOP **MEDIA** TOUR DATES HOLLER CINEMETROPOLIS

## CATEGORIES

VIDEO

MUSIC

WEB RELEASES

## Blue Scholars "Cinemetropolis" Kickstarter Campaign



Visit the link below to support the Blue Scholars "Cinemetropolis" campaign!  
<https://www.kickstarter.com/projects>

Uploaded on: 2011-03-05 23:52:46  
0 comments | 3278 views

Blue Scholars :: Green River  
Community College



GRCC graciously invited us to do a show on their campus, so we brought the camera along to catch some of the story that doesn't

Uploaded on: 2010-09-03 13:01:55  
3 comments | 6683 views

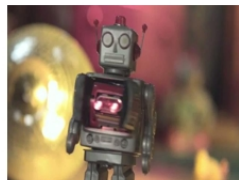
**Blue Scholars :: Kid Cudi x Eugene,  
OR**



We did a show with Kid CuDi + Cool Nutz in Eugene, OR at the Cuthbert Amphitheatre. College Acapellas and CuDi tryna be a

Uploaded on: 2010-09-03 12:54:38  
10 comments | 5451 views

**Paul Valéry (Music Video)**



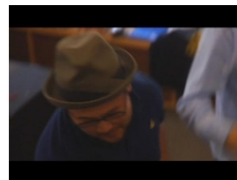
Music video for "Paul Valéry", available for free download at [bluescholars.com](http://bluescholars.com).

**OOF!**



OOF! // AUGUST 2009 // OOF! // AUGUST  
2009 // OOF! // AUGUST 2009 // OOF! //  
AUGUST 2009 // OOF! // AUGUST 2009 //  
OOF! // AUGUST 2009 // OOF! // AUGUST

Angry Weebots x Blue Scholars x  
IN4MATION (OOF! EP)



bunch of us gathered at In4mation's new skate shop at the Ward to peep Angry Woebots put the finishing touches on his COOLBOARDS.

## Blue Scholars Website

facebook

Search

**CINÉ METRO POLIS**

BLUE SCHOLARS.COM

6/14

- Wall
- Info
- Events
- Music
- Discussions
- Photos
- Causes
- RSS I/Ookout

About

Blue Scholars blog – www.bluescholars.com – free music, show reviews and ot... More

52,487 people like this

Blue Scholars

Musician/Band

Wall

Blue Scholars · Top Posts

Share: [Post](#) [Photo](#) [Link](#) [Video](#)

Write something...

Blue Scholars

Blue Scholars Show Love for Seattle's Green and Gold Glory – COLORLINES colorlines.com

The rap group celebrates a city's unyielding love for its team.

about an hour ago · Like · Comment · Reshare

16 people like this.

Sarah Johnston Come back to cali! I will not stop sending comments like this till you comeee bacccck!!! :) about an hour ago · Like

Write a comment...

Blue Scholars

Bump this.

HELLUVASTATE will be featuring at BLUE SCHOLARS – CINEMETROPOLIS RELEASE PARTY, DAY ONE.

THADWICK TRISTEN TREVOR III & SWAN

## Blue Scholars Facebook Page



## Appendix C (Continued):



Blue Scholars Twitter Account

## Appendix D:

### Examples of Chris Schalrb's Web-based platforms

**Chris Schalrb**  
*Musician, Composer, and Producer*


Home Bio Blog Discography Live Events Portfolio Press

Twitter

Portfolio

**The Limpets (Documentary Score)**


SEPTEMBER 9, 2009 by [schlarb](#)



*The Limpets*, is a documentary short by **Justin Dial** and **Nate Smith** about controversial visual artist and teacher **Melanie Weaver**. The subject matter in *Limpets* crosses from whimsical to deeply reflective and I enjoyed writing music that shared those qualities. The four-minute film contains six pieces of original music.

Composed, Recorded and Produced by  
**Chris Schalrb**

Performed by  
**Chris Schalrb** - electric guitar, marimba, melodica, drum programming, percussion



### Chris Schalrb's Website

Hi!, TVwithCheese | Settings | Inbox | Log out

Dashboard You Tracks People Groups Upload & Share

Search SoundCloud

**schlarb**  
Chris Schalrb, Long Beach, United States

Stop following Send message Share a track Share

Mute schlarb

Tracks (38) Sets (5) Comments (9) Favorites (2) DropBox

**When Morning Comes (Electric Version)**  
Uploaded by [schlarb](#) 4 months ago

Share Save to Favorites Download Buy this track

0:00 / 1:54

**When Morning Comes (Acoustic Version)**  
Uploaded by [schlarb](#) 4 months ago

Share Save to Favorites Download Buy this track

0:00 / 1:16

**I Can Live Forever If I Slowly Die (Excerpt)**  
Uploaded by [schlarb](#) 6 months ago

Share Save to Favorites Download

0:00 / 1:16

About

[chrissschlarb.com](#)

Chris Schalrb is a musician, composer and producer based in Long Beach, California. His debut solo album, *Twilight & Ghost Stories*, was a massive collaboration with over fifty musicians and was critically hailed as both, "40 minutes of avant-garde bliss" by the New York Observer and as "a monumental achievement" by FFWD Weekly.

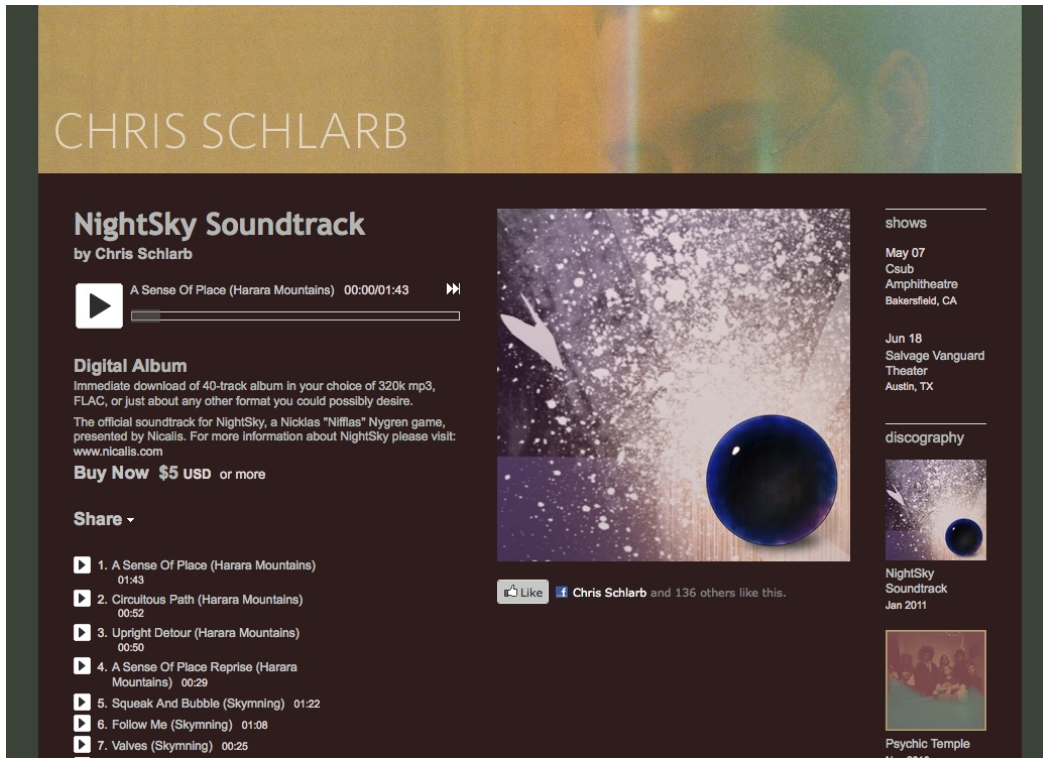
A unique composer utilizing a wide range of instruments, musicians and techniques, Chris has recorded, produced, and scored music for both film and video games. In 2009, Chris and Swedish game designer Niffias collaborated on the *Night Game* for the Nintendo Wii. Chris composed over 45 minutes of original music for *Night Game* which was nominated for the Independent Game Festival's Seumas McNally Grand Prize as well as Excellence in Design.

As a musician and producer he has collaborated with Blue Note recording artist Dave Easley (of The Brian Blade Fellowship), Sufjan Stevens, Nels Cline (of Wilco), Mick Rossi (of The Philip Glass Ensemble), Ikey Owens (of The Mars Volta), Daedelus, Chad Taylor (of Iron & Wine), Dave Longstreth (of The Dirty Projectors), Diane Cluck and Wooden Wand & The Vanishing Voice.

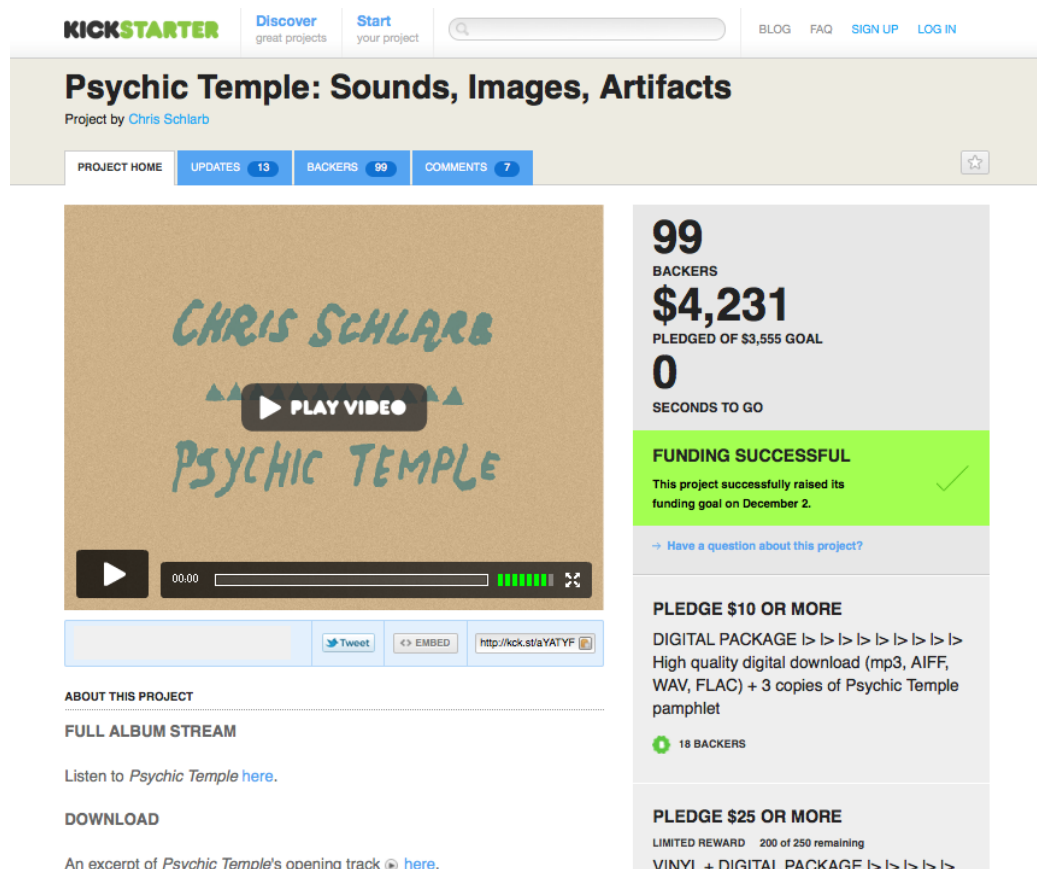
Chris Schalrb's avant-garde duo, I Heart Lung, with drummer and fine artist Tom

### Chris Shlarb's Soundcloud Account

## Appendix D (Continued):



Chris Schlarb's  
Bandcamp Profile



Chris Schlarb's  
Kickstarter  
Campaign:  
Psychic Temple

## Appendix E:

### Examples of Rhymesayers Entertainment's web-based platforms

**Artists / News / Releases / Video / Radio / Events / About / Store** Launch Player

**Hail Mary Mallon**

After years of performing live together and appearing on each other's solo albums, critically acclaimed mc's/producers **Aesop Rock** and **Rob Sonic**, along with **DJ Big Wiz**, come together as **Hail Mary Mallon** and deliver their Rhymesayers debut **Are You Gonna Eat That?**

**Hail Mary Mallon - Smock (Live From The Bur...)**

Pre-Order (physical) now from **Fifth Element | Amazon**  
Buy (digital) now: **iTunes | Amazon**

**News**

**5.2.11 The Family Tour shows in Austin, TX and Tucson, AZ are SOLD OUT!**

**Activity**

**BK-One** posted to **Twitter** about 2 hours ago - Thank god for this right here. I needed this so badly tonight. [http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player\\_embedded&](http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&)

**Events**

**5.4.11 Atmosphere Meet & Greet** at Zia Records: **Atmosphere** in Tucson, AZ @ Zia Records

**5.4.11 DJ Abilities, Musab, Blueprint,**

### Rhymesayers Entertainment Website

**facebook** Search Home Profile Account

**Rhymesayers**  
Record Label

**Wall** Rhymesayers · Top Posts

Share: Post  
Write something...

**Rhymesayers**  
Less than a month until Soundset 2011! Who's headed out to MN and where are you coming from? More info on this year: <http://on.fb.me/dWnsW8>

**Soundset 2011**  
Location: Canterbury Park  
Time: 11:00AM Sunday, May 29th

6 hours ago · Like · Comment · Reshare  
42 people like this.  
View all 32 comments  
Write a comment...

**Rhymesayers**  
Listen to this weekend's episode of RSE Radiol Download: <http://bit.ly/m1Rx9>, Stream: <http://bit.ly/ICsttO>

**RSE Radio**  
RSE Radio is a weekly hip-hop show on Minneapolis' own KFAI Radio. You can catch it live on your radio dial at 90.3 FM Minneapolis and 106.7 FM in St. Paul. The show is also available for live streaming at [www.kfai.com](http://www.kfai.com)

**You and Rhymesayers**  
Michael Wagner and Lara Marsman like this.  
Brother Ali, Felt, Atmosphere

**Recommended Pages** See All  
Panther Patrol  
Kimberly Michelle Gold likes this.  
Like

**Friends' Popular Places**  
World Of Beer  
3,456 check-ins · Coconut Creek, FL

**Sponsored** Create an Ad  
No Risk Trial!  
secure.frs.com  
Try our FREE Energy Pack worth \$30 and pay only \$3.95 for S&H!  
FRS  
LANCE ARMSTRONG  
Master PR Concentration  
publicrelations.kent.edu  
Advance in Public Relations with a PR Focused Master's Degree at Kent State Online. Learn More about the Program Today!  
KENT STATE UNIVERSITY  
LEARN MORE  
Be A Music Producer  
onlinedesigncolleges.com

Rhymesayers  
Entertainment's  
Facebook Page



## Appendix E (Continued):

The screenshot shows the Twitter profile of Rhymesayers Ent (@rhymesayers). The profile header includes the account name, location (Minneapolis, MN), a bio describing them as an independent underground hip-hop group, and their website (http://rhymesayers.com). The profile statistics show 8,228 tweets, 873 following, 22,315 followers, and 929 listed. The timeline displays several tweets, including a thank you to @JoeBlubaugh, a tweet about a live digital album release, and a retweet of @alexpardee. The right sidebar shows connections, including a list of accounts followed by the user and a list of similar accounts.

**Rhymesayers Ent**

**@rhymesayers** Minneapolis, MN

Independent Underground Hip-Hop. New albums from Atmosphere (@atmosphere) and Blueprint (@printmatic) out now in stores everywhere!  
<http://rhymesayers.com>

[Follow](#)

**Timeline** Favorites Following Followers Lists

**rhymesayers** Rhymesayers Ent  
@JoeBlubaugh thanks for the support, glad you like the new record! tell your homies. #hailmarymallon  
3 hours ago

**rhymesayers** Rhymesayers Ent  
@stephanienolen glad you enjoyed the show, thanks for the tweets.  
3 hours ago

**Sarah\_IMG** Sarah Steinbrecher   
@atmosphere at Stubbs BBQ [yfrog.com/h27p1fzj](http://yfrog.com/h27p1fzj)  
7 hours ago

**AesopRockWins** Aesop Rock   
<http://bit.ly/AYGETustream> Hail Mary Mallon live digital album release dinner! @rhymesayers @Rob\_Sonic @AesopRockWins @DJBIGWIZ  
3 hours ago

**rhymesayers** Rhymesayers Ent  
RT @AesopRockWins: HAIL MARY MALLON - ARE YOU GONNA EAT THAT? - OUT NOW!! Download at iTunes or wherever the fuck you download shit!  
5 hours ago

**rhymesayers** Rhymesayers Ent  
RT @alexpardee: Hail Mary Mallon tonight at midnight. Yep.  
5 hours ago

**rhymesayers** Rhymesayers Ent  
RT @kingdj27: 90 minutes til @rhymesayers drops more fire #HailMaryMallon is almost here. Hip hop aint dead, trust me I'm a

**About @rhymesayers**

8,228 Tweets 873 Following 22,315 Followers 929 Listed

**Connections**

Followed by @BrotherAllMpls, @AesopRockWins, and @skyerossi.

You both follow @BrotherAllMpls, @AesopRockWins, @LupeFiasco, and more.

**Following 873**

**Similar to @rhymesayers · view all**

**jbirdrse** · Follow  
DeeJayBird

**soundset** · Follow  
Soundset Festival

**Nicole1067** · Follow  
Nicole Alvarez

**aolmusic** · Follow  
AOL Music

About Help Blog Mobile Status Jobs Terms Privacy Shortcuts Advertisers  
Businesses Media Developers Resources © 2011 Twitter

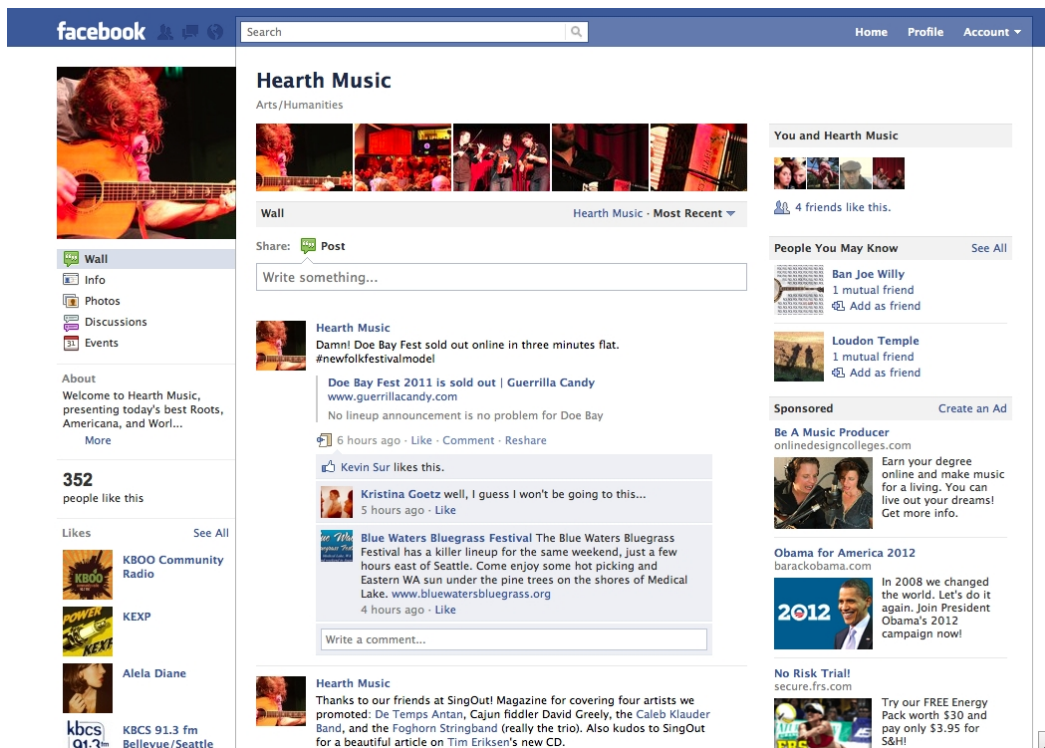
Rhymesayers Entertainment's Twitter Account

## Appendix F:

### Examples of Hearth Music's web-based social networking platforms



### Hearth Music's Website and Blog



### Hearth Music's Facebook Page

## Appendix F (Continued):



Hearth Music's Twitter Account

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