



## **Path as an Artist in 2025 (A Cartel Australia Perspective)**

*How DIY Artists Can Thrive.*

This is one of the more upfront articles that we have written but we feel like it's so necessary to help create a sense of accountability for artists looking to develop sustainable projects. The reality is, countless artists cling to outdated fantasies of major labels, managers and booking agents, hoping they will swoop in to save the day. Newsflash: that's (mostly) a dead-end street in the current music industry climate, and although developing your team is vital at a certain point - the power has shifted and building a sustainable, impactful music career rests squarely on *the artist's shoulders*. You've got the talent? Great. Now what? We're here to lay down the blueprint, the Cartel way – direct, unfiltered, and focused on what actually works.

Below are some key areas we think EVERY artist looking to develop a sustainable career should consider;

### **1. Why are you doing this? What's your end point and how do your strengths factor into your end goal?**

- Are you doing this to create a sustainable career?
- Are you doing this for fun and don't really mind what comes?
- Are you doing this to create enough income to continuously fund more creativity?
- Are you doing this for money?

Understanding the reason(s) you want to develop an artist project is step one. Not having a somewhat clear indication can create friction and unrealistic expectations that almost always result in the project's ending. Having a clear indication of WHY you are doing this, allows you to work backwards to get to that goal.

You want to win a grammy? How?

You want to become an international touring act and fund your lifestyle via touring? How

The second phase in this process is utilising your strengths / passions to direct you to your end goal. For example if you are a proficient songwriter and your end goal is to fund your project by publishing and co-writing, you then have a (rough) blueprint to move forward.

### **2. Beyond the Surface: Constructing a Brand**

Slapping a few filters on your photos and sporadically posting on TikTok, plus working on a release to release basis with no connectivity isn't a brand and it isn't a strategy - it's just noise. A *real, sustainable project* is about intentionality, control, and a deep understanding of your artistic identity. It's the cohesive story you tell across every touchpoint. Your visuals, your messaging, your interactions – they all need to be deliberate and resonate with who you are as an artist. Stop waiting for a label to define you. Take the reins and articulate your vision to the world. Cultivate a genuine community, not just a fleeting collection of followers. People crave authentic connection; they can smell inauthenticity a mile away. Invest the time and energy in building those meaningful relationships, and you'll foster a fanbase that sticks with you through thick and thin. Half-hearted efforts yield half-hearted results.

*"Artist branding and narrative development is something we consistently come back to in almost all of our conversations with independent and developing acts. This whole idea that your Instagram aesthetic, your press images, and a few other things are all-encompassing of an artist brand is an utter oversight from an act who is trying to develop a meaningful career out of their art. It's so much more than just a logo."*

- Anthony Agostino (Head of Digital Strategy and Artist/Label Services at Cartel Australia)

### **3. Streaming Platforms: A Tool, Not a Golden Ticket**

Yes, Spotify, Apple Music, and the like are essential for discoverability and reaching a wider audience. They're part of the ecosystem. But let's be brutally honest: the per-stream payouts are negligible. Banking on streams as your primary revenue source is a recipe for disappointment. Treat these platforms as distribution channels, optimize your presence, and absolutely pitch for those coveted playlist placements. However, you *must* diversify your income streams. Platforms like Bandcamp allow for more direct artist-to-fan interaction and significantly better revenue splits. Patreon enables your dedicated supporters to directly fund your work. And don't even get us started on the importance of merchandise – tangible items that fans can connect with and that provide a much-needed financial boost. If you're putting all your eggs in the streaming basket, you're essentially working for pennies.

### **4. Content is part of the strategy but NOT the whole strategy.**

When talking about social media, most artists expect us to say *"you just need to post more, be consistent with content, more more more"*. They couldn't be more wrong. Don't mistake our opinion, content is important, but it isn't the be all and end all of your social media development. An out now post, or "please buy tickets to my show" post does absolutely nothing for your development and in reality your potential listeners don't care.

Instead, put your emphasis into your own outward engagement. Start openly engaging in niches that link to your project.

- Who are you talking to?
- How are you targeting them?
- What are you talking to them about?

The reality is: who you're talking to is way more important than what you're posting.

### **5. Assembling Your Inner Circle: Building a Functional and Supportive Team**

Forget the outdated notion that a major label is the only path to success. What you truly need is a dedicated and competent team that believes in your vision. This could include a manager to handle logistics, a publicist to generate buzz, designers to craft your visual identity, and videographers to capture your story. Whether these individuals are paid professionals or trusted members of your inner circle, their contribution is invaluable. However, be discerning about who you surround yourself with. Avoid yes-men who simply echo your thoughts. Seek out individuals who will challenge you, push your boundaries, and offer honest, sometimes difficult, feedback. A strong, supportive team amplifies your efforts and helps you navigate the complexities of the industry.

### **6. Ownership is Empowerment: Securing Your Creative and Financial Future**

In the independent music landscape, independence is paramount. Owning your master recordings gives you ultimate control over your music and its destiny. Explore diverse avenues for monetisation beyond traditional sales and streams. Consider sync licensing opportunities for film, television, and advertising. Investigate the potential of NFTs and limited-edition releases to engage your fanbase in new and exciting ways. Every time you relinquish control over your masters and distribution, you're ceding potential revenue streams and hindering your long-term financial independence. Protecting your intellectual property and retaining ownership is the cornerstone of a sustainable and autonomous career.

The cold, hard truth is this: the music industry isn't a charity. No one is going to magically hand you success. You have to build it, brick by painstaking brick. Hustle relentlessly, maintain unwavering consistency, and make informed, strategic decisions. The DIY revolution isn't on the horizon; it's the current reality. If you're not willing to embrace this new paradigm, you'll be left watching from the sidelines.