



## Working With Artists.

*From the perspective of industry professionals.*

Generally when we write these articles, we are writing them as if we are speaking directly to artists - with the perspective of the artist as a primary focus. In short, we want to provide information, knowledge, advice and thoughts that we believe will either assist an artist with their development, or understanding of the industry that we are all working in. For this article, we wanted to change it up slightly. It has become more and more evident as we speak with artists and other industry professionals and as we scan the development of artists that we have worked with (including those we've managed) and those we haven't worked with, that music managers and music businesses are increasingly undervalued or are sometimes choosing artists to work with that are unreliable, non-committal and aren't working to the capacity that they should be for their own project - for the sake of talent. For the music managers and music businesses, we want to address this, including ideas for how to scout the right artists (those who are not only talented but reliable and committed) from our own experiences, what to watch for and what to admire when working with artists and how to put safeguards in place to protect yourself and your business. For the artists still reading this, we think it can be a valuable article for you as well; taken as an opportunity to understand more about the other side of the industry, the often unseen actions and efforts artist teams put into a growing project and what industry teams are often searching for when looking to take on a management, label or development roles for an artist.

Artists are PIVOTAL to our day-to-day work as music managers, businesses and development agencies (hereinafter referred to as 'Industry'). Without artists, there is no creative that we work with, no shows we work on and attend, and generally no music that we can listen to, appreciate and help to build. But that doesn't mean that working with artists day-in, day-out is not without its set of challenges. And we mean CHALLENGES. Whether that be the attitude of a perfectionist artist, who, although hours of work and copious dollars has been put into a particular release or music video, will refuse to release anything due to it 'not feeling or looking right' even though it is a product that was discussed and agreed upon just a few weeks before. Whether it be the entitled artist, who after years of hard work and assistance to the point of steady growth, simply says 'I want to build this project alone now' unaffected and unwarranted - taking with them the years of work and growth, and the percentage payment that you are fully entitled to and are FINALLY receiving. Whether it be the artist who is convinced they are a talent above, their ego on full display, who won't listen to advice or suggestions on growth (even though your experience in artist development and years in the industry far outweighs theirs) stops creating or stays stagnant, affecting the development and hard work that you've already put into the project; only to turn around two months later and come up with a 'genius idea' - the same idea that you suggested two months before. We can almost see the nodding in agreement of industry reading this and we'd bet they've encountered artists like this before. We'd like to say that the three examples mentioned above (and there are many other scenarios and artist attitudes that we could list) are one-off incidents but unfortunately, these are experiences that we've had time and again, and examples that we've heard from industry through our discussions. For the artists still reading, PLEASE break the mold from the above, and understand that we as industry are here to help but we are not working FOR you - we are working WITH you to develop.

So, now that we've outlined the challenges that artist sometimes present, we want to identify and discuss (through the lens of our own experiences in the industry as artist development, management and close collaborators with multiple A&R's via label servicing) the characteristics of the ideal artist to work with and what to bring into the working relationship to help recognise and further develop that artist. In our industry in 2023, the 'creative brand' that an artist must establish to build an audience and create sustainability lies outside of just making the music. It's the simple fact of our current landscape. They need to be the pioneers of their own brand and overarching brand drivers, they must have a good understanding of themselves, their target audiences and what they want to realistically achieve in monthly, quarterly and yearly goals and an actionable plan to be able to get them there; they need to be comfortable with social media platforms (even if artists don't want to be forward-facing, how are they utilising them to build an audience and brand?), they need to WANT to get better and learn and they need to be putting in the maximum effort that they can be, the majority of the time.

Understandably, that's a lot for artists to take on, and there is a shift in the ways that we need to approach this undertaking with them. A more hands-on role may be required when working with them - on top of the usual actions - assisting in the strategies and brand narratives that will keep artists on track through a release cycle; and again helping to create opportunities both in the digital landscape to further build online audiences and day-to-day to help transform those digital listeners / audience members or scrollers by into actual fans that will buy tickets to shows and develop a higher demand for more opportunity for your artist. Always keeping in mind that for the majority of the time (and ideally) you do not want to be working harder than the artist you are working alongside. The above then requires more structure on our part, more compartmentalisation, a greater emphasis on efficiency, better and more frequent communication with your artist and perhaps, learning new skills to keep up with modern landscapes. Learning on other industry via frequent discussions on how to have a greater impact on the artists that you look after, AND ensuring that you're across all best practices for each platform has never been more important. To assist with structure, we have put together the main actions to focus on when developing artists who want to have sustainability through music and build a career in this industry.

- A good understanding of their overarching brand drivers + goals, and the ability to communicate those with an audience
- The ability to create an audience via digital / social media platforms
- Timeliness (a good understanding of time management) and a commitment to craft
- The ability to learn, network and be a team player
- The capability to create quality music and the tenacity to continue creating
- Grit and determination, and the understanding that not everything is going to go the way it's planned
- The actual relationships and networks to build the brand and achieve the target goals

Below are some links to previous articles that also might help spark a new idea or delve into the above a bit further.

Building Blocks:

[https://www.cartelmanagementaus.com.au/files/ugd/6f3230\\_58d0cfd16c664442892a285efde1bb63.pdf](https://www.cartelmanagementaus.com.au/files/ugd/6f3230_58d0cfd16c664442892a285efde1bb63.pdf)

Building A Team:

[https://www.cartelmanagementaus.com.au/files/ugd/6f3230\\_deed1520bc904f2baaba84b9105ae726.pdf](https://www.cartelmanagementaus.com.au/files/ugd/6f3230_deed1520bc904f2baaba84b9105ae726.pdf)

2023 Music Landscape:

[https://www.cartelmanagementaus.com.au/files/ugd/6f3230\\_d93d3d04712c4a2280eb950382ebfc10.pdf](https://www.cartelmanagementaus.com.au/files/ugd/6f3230_d93d3d04712c4a2280eb950382ebfc10.pdf)

We admire artist passion and creativity, and there are many artist traits that we should recognise as helpful or desirable (for the purpose of this article) when it comes to considering taking on management, label or development roles for artists. Those traits include: the ability to be agile with their marketing, branding and development roles for artists. Those traits include: the ability to be agile with their marketing, branding and creativity, those willing to always learn more and not be complacent in their abilities, those willing to reach out to peers and take chances, those that have the ability to communicate with honesty and an open-mind, those with strong instincts and stronger intentionality who are able to listen and consider alternative views and respectfully counterpoint to a solution, those that can positively (or at least pragmatically) work through issues that present themselves etc. Generally, these are really helpful initial traits that you will begin to pick up on after a couple of meetings. This is where we generally would suggest a 'grace' or 'trial' period with artists, before signing them for multiple years of management or record deals. At the beginning of that period, clearly communicate the above and set expectations that they have to meet for you - just as artists usually set out expectations for us to meet for them. Within this time, it'll be clear whether or not you can work together. Generally, and in our experiences, even if the artists you are taking on are supremely talented and you can see potential and potential earnings with them, they won't ever meet your expectations long-term, if they're not meeting them within the first three months (or however long the trial period lasts). Just like relationships, those red flags don't disappear and are ones to watch, in order to safeguard your business and your time (and sometimes, your sanity). We would also strongly suggest looking the way that your contract / agreement with your artists are structured, ensuring that they have a list of non-negotiable actions for your business and for the artist that both parties can point to and be held accountable by. Additionally, we would suggest putting a 'post-relationship earnings' section in the agreement, so if there was ever an unforeseeable breakdown in the relationship with your artist (see artist example 2, a couple of paragraphs up), you are still able to recoup earnings on the records and performances that you help to release + organise.

Usually, industry will take on an artist for one of two reasons (without being super romantic about the 'love of that artist'- they either have a solid community that is easier to build upon and will ensure that financial return can be achieved faster, or they have immense talent that aligns with the expertise of that particular industry representative and they can build upon that. I.e. industry will make money and see the artists potential, or they see the artist's potential and will make money. Essentially, both reasons amount to the same processes and action plans that those industry put into place. And all of that is absolutely necessary to provide artists with opportunities and give them the best service possible - which lies within the capabilities of that particular industry professional. As mentioned above however, we would urge more caution (particularly in this landscape, and in the case of more limited financial resources and / or knowledge bases) when selecting to work with artists off the basis of talent only. Yes, they might be the most talented producer or songwriter or musician, or they might display the most 'rockstar' of potential (trust us, we understand) but again, if those artists do not have the capability or desire to delve head-first into every aspect of their project - they will not be the best artists to work with. Within our discussions with other artist managers and label representatives, we truly believe that the 'right' artist needs to have an in-built drive for all creative components - including social media content and audience engagement; a strict (or semi-strict) timeframe structure and understanding of time management and efficiency when creating their artform; a sensible approach to commitment of the relationship as a person and as an artist and the general qualities of a teamplayer. For artists still reading, if you can honestly say that this is you - you're the perfect catch!

So, after all of the above - industry, please move into artist relationships with your eyes wide open, how to spot the artist you want to work with and foster more meaningful and fulfilling working relationships with them, and an understanding of what you need to bring to the table. Artists - please remember, industry like managers, labels, artist development agencies and the like are working WITH you, not FOR you and often have a really adaptive and developed skillset. Please treat us accordingly and don't make us cry - or at the very least, don't make us forget why we wanted to help in the first place.

