



CARTEL MANAGEMENT AUSTRALIA

Building Blocks

Building your long-term plan > focussing on release-to-release success.

In an age where instant gratification often triumphs over long term growth, we are here to remind artists why a slow build is actually more conducive to longevity - particularly when artist development is the goal. Although putting content across social media platforms and exploding into a 'viral sensation' seems to be the way that most artists and music projects are growing at a global scale right now, the reality is that (more often than not) there is a concise and well thought-out strategy behind 'the overnight success'. The intention of this article is to discuss the benefits of creating and executing artist development building blocks, rather than focussing on a single by single release basis.

As always, if the intention of your artist project is to create music and not communicate with an audience (where you aren't fussed over engagement and growth into a career), then this article is not for you. If your intention is to create and sustain a career from your artform, we invite you to continue reading.

With audience attention spans becoming shorter and the accessibility of releasing music and content as an independent artist becoming easier, the single-to-single release formula is now outdated. One-off single, EP and LP releases are now only a drop in the ocean compared to what an audience is being exposed to on a second-by-second basis. The idea that an artist can release once and automatically have an audience (and therefore grow a sustainable career) is a disturbing way for artists to approach their projects, as it pins the expectation of an entire project on one release.

Looking and planning further in the future is the only beneficial way to develop a sustainable artist project. It allows the artist to not only improve creatively but also gives the intended audience time to be exposed to the project, trust the project and ultimately invest into the project in the form of a repeat listener / ticket buyer etc.. In our opinion and experience, what separates the great projects from the middle-of-the-road ones, is the ability for the project to create a balance between two things:

First is the **creative**; as without the music, the project has no meaning; and
Second, effectively **communicating that music** to an audience that's likely to care over a period of time.
Projects that can do this (regardless of support or opportunities) ultimately flourish.

Below, we have listed key areas that we believe serve as the foundational building blocks for most independent artists whose goal is to create financial sustainability with their artist project.

1. Back catalogue is the base.

Having a back catalogue of music is the base of any artist / music project. Without music, there is no project. Having a back catalogue (the larger the better) is beneficial for multiple reasons including but not limited to:

- Range of creativity across multiple projects.
- A roadmap for development moving forward.
- Opportunities to collaborate with artists.

- Expression of ideas.
- Allows time for artists not to be rushing out the next release.

With growth and development artists are always going to create better music tomorrow than what they are creating today. Having a back catalogue does not mean that every piece of music needs to be released or that yearly release plans cannot be altered if an artist is moving in a new direction (via new music) or wants to release another song etc. A back catalogue simply allows the artist / the artist team to create a rough road map and be able to add process and system around each release to help the artist get to where they want to be.

Using our own management clients at Cartel as an example, we have found that working off a back catalogue extremely useful over the course of a 12 -18 month period, and has looked like this:

-November / December / ½ January: Artists have no releases scheduled and have this period to be as creative as possible with no real time constraints. They use this time to collaborate, experiment, get a general feel of a direction they want to head in moving forward. The artist agrees to create demos in this timeframe.

- 2nd ½ of January: We sit down with the artist and look at all of the material created over the last period. Hypothetically, say X artist has written 10 new songs in that time - of that 10, 6 are finished (or close to being finalised), of that 6 - the artist is extremely bullish on releasing 4 as singles.

We can then plot out the next 6-8 months of releases using 4 of those songs. With that information, we (as management) can begin delegating to booking agents to assist with touring around releases, deal with the legalities of the releases themselves, and create a more structured plan of growth (audience engagement and building) for that 6-8 month period. As mentioned above, if the artist wants to swap / change or switch out songs because they have written better material in the release period - we can do this, as this plan is a base.

- Next 6-8 Month period: We can begin executing on the above plan.

At the forefront of the project, X artist has a consistent release schedule, they are keeping active, therefore communications with media and industry can grow as well as developing more audience via releasing / touring.

In the backend of the project, X artist now has another 6-8 months to be able to create another back catalogue with no time constraints, pressure or fear of losing momentum.

Although a system like the above doesn't work for everyone, a format similar to this will allow artists to create balance and not burn out, as well as focus their energy in areas they actually want to focus on. A format like this can be done completely independently with no management - it just requires process and the willingness to do the work.

2. Understand your strengths / weaknesses.

Everyone has different strengths & weaknesses and understanding how to double down and leverage on strengths can be potentially a good way to earn a more stable income.

Some examples of this are:

- if your strength is in production, there may be room to produce for artists that aren't so strong for a negotiated fee; or potentially create beat / sample packs (or similar) to sell via websites like Splice.

- If your songwriting / vocal work is your strength, creating toplines for other artists for a negotiated fee.
- If you have a loyal fanbase and want to lean into the fashion world, creating and selling merchandise when there is demand.

Understanding what your strengths and weaknesses are will help artists understand the goal that they want to achieve and what to focus on to actually achieve it.

3. Be clear about your desired outcome.

Understanding the above, artists can really nail down on focuses that will help them build within the industry. For example:

- Building your catalogue to leverage a publishing / sync deals (if your strength is songwriting)
- Build a meaningful audience (with your catalogue) to then leverage touring opportunities (if your strength / passion is touring).

Having a clear focus about goals and objectives is paramount to developing sustainability in this industry.

4. Streamline the creative process / streamline the communication to audience process + repeat over catalogue.

Within all creative processes (write, demo, record, produce, mix & master) artists have preferred work flows, instruments they play, studios they use, people they work with and throughout - the overall process gets refined and better every release. By continually streamlining, artists are able to consistently create better records. This is where artists / musicians operate freely and most of the time, artists focus all of their time and resources on this aspect of growth.

Following on from the creative side, creating system in every other area of the project is a necessity for growth.

- The process of a release (focusses, timelines, a plan for each digital store / social media platform, media, building a database etc)
- The process of a live show (FOH, BOH, ticketing, rehearsals, guest lists etc)

The above examples are for the majority of artists who release and perform their music. Having systems in place to ensure the desired outcome is not only efficient and time-effective but also allows the artist to remain accountable to their growth. Although these processes can consistently change as the industry landscape changes, the ability to create and streamlining processes will not only allow the artist to measure growth but also get the most out of their creativity.

5. Time Management

In a previous article [Your Wasting 16 Hours A Day](#) we spoke a lot about allocating specific time to your artist project and maximising that time while balancing your day job, schooling, social life etc. This topic generally comes under a lot of fire, thanks largely to the 'hustlers' and the 'motivation gurus' because the messages they share can come across as condescending and have very little context attached to it. The work until you drop methodology has been adopted by many and can often lead to issues like burn out or people falling out of love with music all together. On the complete other end of the spectrum, in an age of social media and 'ultimate convenience', the amount of distractions that are available to take up valuable time are everywhere. Establishing a healthy balance between your life and your work to maximise your happiness should be of key importance. Ultimately, your passion project is as successful as the time that you put into it. If you are putting minimal time in and your expectation is to grow rapidly, then you are creating a situation where frustration and anxiety will cause doubt and stress. Obviously, not everyone has the same time or routine and it is no 'one size fits all' affair but try to break down a normal 24 hour

'working' day and create a plan that works for you. Learn to prioritise your time in every part of your project, not just studio time.

Hopefully all of the building blocks above are useful for artists on their journey towards sustainability and growth. At the end of the day, it is simple and almost all artist projects will grow utilising this strategy:

- Work off a back catalogue.
- Create processes in every area.
- Understand what you want, and how to get there.
- Manage your time.