



CARTEL MANAGEMENT AUSTRALIA

Be Professional.

If you want to build a career as an artist, act like it.

An artist's journey almost always starts as a passion that develops into a hobby. As they navigate through their development, the prospect of wanting to build into a career artist becomes the goal post for 'success' for the majority. With that change in priority needs to come a change in attitude across all areas of the project, which often, is easier said than done.

The topic of this article focusses on independent artist professionalism. If creating a sustainable career out of your artform is your goal, then all of the habits utilised when creating music as a hobby need to be addressed and held to account. Throughout this article, we wish to highlight behaviors that can affect the growth of artist project and pass on best practices - largely centred around forms of communication and decorum.

Before moving forward, this article may seem argumentative (at points) to some artists, and we feel we need to be clear that we are not singling out any particular artists, nor are we implying that artists are 'less' or 'miss-informed' in any way. What we wish for artists to understand is that if they want a career, they need to act like it. The reality is, that the majority of the artists that we deal with on a day to day basis, who claim that "*music is their life*", rarely act that way. Whether it be the way that they present themselves (online and in-person), the way they communicate (online and in-person), the expectations they have for the short term gain, their lack of effort and accountability, and just general etiquette are a few examples of things that we experience and address daily.

Below are some key areas that we feel as though need to be addressed constantly with artists who want to take the next step in their professionalism and career.

Communication

The music industry is built on relationships and particularly in the AU/NZ territory bubble, (generally) everyone knows everyone. Communicating in the correct manner is vital to the growth of your project, whether you are trying to introduce yourself to industry people, whether you're outsourcing a service or even if you are just trying to connect with your audience.

Your **online** method of communication with other artists may sometimes differ from communications with industry representatives, depending on the nature of the relationship.

Generally, communications with other artists who you are collaborating with / speaking to can be a little more informal and may take place over direct messages, whereas industry communications should be a little more formal. Unless otherwise stated.

Industry can be defined as anyone who works in music from day to day - (media, managers, booking agents, labels, publishers, PR etc). In those instances, email is ALWAYS the best practice for communication. This allows both parties to keep a record of communications and is formatted to ensure accountability and response. Instagram

(although quick) does not allow for accountability or ease of record. Communication via email also allows you to attach larger documents / and does not have a word limit, which allows you to adequately express your intention.

Just because you prefer Instagram or direct message, it doesn't mean it's best practice. Go through the proper channels.

To give you a more in- depth example, we at Cartel get on average about 25-30 DM's via Instagram every day from artists looking for advice / representation, and the most common opening sentences are:

"Yo fam.. I need management can you hook me up"

"I've been grinding on my own for a year, I need management to take me to the next level"

"Listen to my demo"

"I want to work with you guys but financially not in a good spot, will you still work with me?"

"Can you get me signed to a label"

PLEASE DO NOT BE THAT ARTIST...

Although it is flattering that artists want to connect and share their story, 9 times out of 10 from the first communication, we / any industry will begin to gather a sense of the artist's motives and experience. If you are reaching out to industry online it is VITAL to present yourself in a professional way that allows you to introduce yourself and also represent your brand in the best light.

At the end of the day how you present yourself online and in-person with your communications is how people will ultimately treat your project. If you use one of the above quotes, treat your project as a joke or as a hobby you do not take seriously, the industry will not take you seriously.

Some keys for online / in person communication with industry:

- Email is best practice and allows for communication to be kept as a record NOT instagram / direct message.
- Ensure spelling and sentence structure is correct - (get someone to proofread your emails).
- Only send vital information to the communication.
- DO NOT swear or talk down to anyone or about anyone.
- Make communications personal. Don't copy and paste. (Yes, we can tell when you have done this.)
- Regularly check emails and REPLY TO EVERYTHING.
- Show up to meetings early.
- Do not cancel on a meeting / commitment within 24 hours of the commitment. (Obviously unless it cannot be avoided)
- Be clear and concise.
- If action is required from a communication urgently. GET IT DONE.
- Do not miss deadlines.

When You Make A Commitment FOLLOW THROUGH.

This topic is something we deal with almost-daily. Where artist's commit to working with us in some capacity and on the day of the commitment cancel. Canceling, (or not following through with something) is okay if it cannot be avoided, but our experience is more-often-than-not a situation where artists are not organized, or not clear on the expectations required of them.

A lot of the time when you are making a commitment and not following through, you are legitimately wasting the other party's time. This is an absolute sure fire way to ensure that industry will not want to work with you again. When you make a commitment, ensure that you are aware of all of the elements attached to it (i.e price, time, expectations) and make an informed decision. Changing your mind just before (or in some cases, even after the allotted time of the meeting) makes you seem untrustworthy and frankly - a waste of valuable time.

Following that, haggling or trying to negotiate price is something that we have also spoken about a lot in these articles and the premise is simple: If you don't have the money to outsource an expert (i.e. mixing / mastering engineers, PR agents, videographer / photographers etc.) then do not do it - and find a way around your issue. It is absolutely offensive when artists think it is okay to haggle or negotiate on fixed costs when outsourcing. You must understand that although music may not be your full time career, it is for the people you are outsourcing to, and artists must respect that. At the end of the day, if you do not respect the service, the service will not respect you.

For more information regarding financial structures / outsourcing read our [Understanding Finances article here.](#)

This also extends heavily to deadlines you / your team place on your project. If you have a set release schedule or have agreed to deliver a single by a certain date to a certain party, then do it. Too many artists claim 'writers / creativity block' for not hitting specific deadlines that they're generally setting, and that is nothing more than an excuse. We are not claiming that a block in creativity isn't an issue, and sometimes breaks are needed, but a lot of artists tend to use this as an excuse to push back a date, which ultimately pushes back a deadline.

These commitments should be made with the express knowledge of your workflow and outside priorities. It is unacceptable to say time is an issue when you wish to create a financially sustainable career out of music, because the project should be among your highest (professional) priorities.

For more information regarding Time management refer to our [Time Management article here.](#)

You Aren't The Expert (Listen To The People That Are)

This one is pretty simple. If you're hiring someone to help you in a specific area (mixing / mastering / PR / design etc.), please understand that they are aware of what works in their area of expertise. Do not think you know more than the people you are hiring. This is an issue that is becoming more prevalent with the accessibility to become an artist. A lot of artists believe they know how to navigate relationships and platforms, and do not take into account the guidance / support shown from the 'expert' the artist hired in the first place. This can make you look egotistical and makes you difficult to work with.

The above may seem like common sense but from our own experience we can confidently say that the artists who put in place structures offered by outsourced parties, often develop faster than the ones that don't. Often, when knowledge is passed on, artists undertake the service and do not implement the knowledge - and revert back to what they were doing before. For us, when this happens, we will always reconsider our position on whether we will work with that artist again.

Expectation v Reality

This is probably the biggest issue that we see in emerging, developing and grass-roots level projects. A lot of artists that we speak with have grand plans for their project as a whole (which is great), but no actionable / measurable strategy on how to actually attain what they think they deserve. Expectations on a release or perceived growth of a project ultimately leads artists down a path of disappointment and doubt, which then leads to the majority of artists to quit before they even get started. The way to combat this, is to regularly set goals - and within those long and short term goals, create consistent & sustainable actions that will lead to that goal.

The below examples set a really clear indication of not only attitude and effort but also the information with which you can properly communicate with industry. Want industry to see you as professional? Then at least have a base plan to develop in all areas.

EXAMPLE #1

X artist is putting out a single and wants 3 editorial playlists on Spotify.

-X does his spotify for artist pitch, hires a PR company but does no other work across the spotify platform pre release.

-X thinks "This song is good I hope I get lucky here"

When the song is released X artist feels disheartened because Spotify isn't backing their 'best release yet'. This happens across X artist's next 3 singles and X quits music and becomes resentful of other artists gaining playlisting.

EXAMPLE #2

Y artist is releasing his 1st single of the year and has a goal of building into editorial playlists on Spotify.

-Y has 3 more singles to be released every three months to close out the year.

-Y puts specific processes / actions regarding independent playlisting + YouTube across single number one with plans (regardless of support) to continue those processes across the next three singles.

-Y creates activity on their spotify artist profile through: creating playlists, pitching previous works, creating and building relationships with a database of independent curators to pitch to.

Y doesn't receive editorial support on single 1, but has had their release streamed over 2000 times across the opening 2 weeks. Y then applies and adapts the same process to the following releases and ultimately gets support once they trigger algorithmic playlisting enough times to move up the store tier system.

Example 1 relies only on the merit of a subjective piece of art. There is no actionable / measurable strategy to tangibly build on the Spotify platform.

Example 2 clearly shows a willingness to create specific actions and can allow the artist to build into the editorial support they wanted, and although they did not receive editorial support on the release, Y artist put themselves in the best position to gain editorial on the next go round. That process is repeated until they eventually grow an 'active' audience and then gain support.

When communicating with industry (us included) a base understanding of platforms and actions that can be attached to a particular part of your development shows us the thought process of the artist, and the willingness to be on the front foot. This is a lot more attractive to us (and to all industries) than an artist who expects results because they think their song is the greatest thing to hit spotify.

Using the process of releasing music as the focus, as that is the overall goal for most, ask yourself the following:

-What is it I want from Spotify / Apple / Youtube?

-What specific things am I in control of to get what I want from Spotify / Apple / Youtube?

-How can I apply what I am in control of, in a consistent manner while still prioritizing music creation?

Apply those questions to Social media, online media, all forms of radio and live shows and you will begin to challenge your own thinking regarding specific tangible actions.

If you are an artist that wants to begin taking steps to build a sustainable career out of your artist project, sit down and evaluate and scrutinize EVERYTHING you are doing. Industry's perception of you needs to be that of an artist willing to not only work but actually be a professional operator.