



CARTEL MANAGEMENT AUSTRALIA

Do You Actually Need PR For Your Music?

The right time to engage, and where your artist project should be in your journey for publicity to benefit your project.

The purpose of this article is to discuss the role of publicity in music. Over our 7 years operating Cartel Creative, we have worked with many different artists, labels (major & independent) and events with varying knowledge on what PR is - which is why we felt it necessary to write an article that outlines the role, but also empowers artists to work out whether they actually need a PR service for the current point in their journey.

Firstly, we do acknowledge that not all PR agents / companies that operate within the music industry are ethically sound in their intentions but that should not subtract from the agents doing fantastic work for artists and music businesses across the globe. To understand how to distinguish between good and bad PR agents, please read our [Stop Expecting Work For Free article here](#). A lot of the time there are very clear red flags surrounding companies who do not have artists best interests at heart, and it is up to the discretion of the artist as to whether they choose to work with specific companies or not.

If you are an artist that has had a bad experience with publicity, this article is vital for you to read and understand. We want to clarify what should be taken into consideration / actioned before engaging with an 'actual industry professional'.

Taking all of the above into account, what is public relations in music? When is the right time for an artist to engage with a publicist? Following that, what should artists be acutely aware of before outsourcing a publicity role?

MUSIC PUBLICITY ROLE DEFINED & ARTIST EXPECTATIONS

Music public relations (PR) has varied definitions and can be described in a myriad of different ways across the globe. At its most basic, Music PR is the strategic consultation and promotion of the artist, track or brand as a whole. Generally and as defined above, PR will help to assist and promote your release. They will execute a set out strategy that they feel will best help you in bringing audience awareness and industry engagement to your music. They do this by pitching to their established and constantly updated media list via personal emails, phone calls and private messages that they have built up and nurtured over their career to get you, the artist, third party articles, radio and online media. Publicists are NOT responsible for editorial support on streaming services (Spotify, Apple Music, YouTube etc) and if you have engaged with a publicist who says they can help with editorial support you are being lied to. Editorial support on streaming is solely on the distribution service the artist is aligned with, and although a publicist can support in independent playlisting to grow activity, editorial support does not fall under the publicity category.

What is important for artists to note when engaging with a publicist is that their role is to gain awareness, yes, but awareness doesn't always mean placement on radio, blogs, playlists, podcasts and other media outlets. The attitude of most artists when engaging with PR is that they are paying a specific amount, and that because of that they "expect placement". The reality is that PR can send out music out to the media, but the decision to add or share the song falls solely on the media.

"Publicity can and should always provide feedback, but can never guarantee placement on blogs radio or playlisting" - Anthony Agostino (CMA Co-Director)

Artists generally focus on one release, not in the way it fits in and develops a catalogue and traditionally for PR, this was a good way of working as the focus is only on one piece of audio / body of work. However with the accessibility of music in this current climate, the artist mindset needs to shift into how their next release sets up the following, building from one to the next continuously. This is where feedback from PR can become useful, it is okay if you do not get a response on the first single, or even the second, but maybe you will get one on the third. All of this allows an artist to develop over multiple releases rather than having the focus being on "the one".

THE RIGHT TIME TO GET A PUBLICIST

This is an easy one, you should only engage PR when:

- You have an absolute understanding of what they can do for you.
- You can afford it. (not personal money, but money reinvested back into the project)
- You have a clear vision of what your project is and have specific focuses around awareness, and what that awareness means. (*I.e online media is good social proof but isn't necessarily conducive to growing streams*)
- Your marketing presence is active and conducive to growth.
- Your social media presence is active and conducive to growth.
- You have your own infrastructure (network, pitching processes) in place to pitch.
- You have a relationship with a publicist.

If you are not clear on the 7 items listed above then you are either not ready / do not have the resources for PR to actually be beneficial for you and your project. Hiring a publicist is not a quick fix in areas of the project you have a lack of interest in, nor is it a form of accelerated growth just because you have invested money. Publicity is only beneficial when it adds an extra layer to what you are already doing. It is extremely concerning when an artist approaches us for a campaign with the expectation of major placement, no infrastructure and the mindset of "I'm paying, I deserve" as these artists always leave the campaigns with a bad taste in their mouth.

Adding to the above, finances play a major role in deciding whether publicity campaigns are viable for artists. Publicity is not a free service offered to artists, most businesses (ourselves included) operate as not just a hobby, but as a career with which we support ourselves. So haggling around price points etc is something that we view as strongly disrespectful. If you haven't got the budget, don't outsource the service, simple.

Making money at all, let alone profit, isn't easy as an independent artist. When shifting the artist mindset into creating a career, the first thing we would challenge you to think about is to cut off any unnecessary spending. For example, if an independent artist who has had no experience doing their own publicity and had no real connection with the media or within the industry, our advice would be to grow that themselves (for free) over multiple releases, prior to investing in a PR company. That will do a few things, 1. It gives the artist the opportunity to learn and experience the best practices of PR in the industry, 2. It gives the artist the opportunity to create and sustain relationships over a long period of time with industry, rather than having to rely on someone you pay, 3rd it is free, and only requires investment of time. As the project begins to grow and has more income to re-invest back into the project, things like publicity are certainly a smart thing to invest into, but at least the artist will have a solid understanding of what that PR professional is doing and the artist will be able to keep them accountable to their focus. It also allows artists not to leverage all their budget on PR too early.

For more information related to finances in music, please read our [Understanding Finances article here](#).

THINGS TO BE AWARE OF:

- Placement is not guaranteed.
- You are paying for a publicist's time and access to media, not their ability to land said media.
- The artist's label / distributor are responsible for editorial DSP servicing not PR.
- The PR's process: Are they initially pitching? What are their strengths / weaknesses, and how does that affect the release?
- Back end of campaigns (campaign start / end dates, expectations, focusses, forms of communication etc)
- Have your deliverables ready before engaging with publicity (song in distribution, cover art, listening link, press images, biographies etc)
- Communication: your publicist should be updating you frequently during the campaign and communication lines should be open. This does not mean it is okay to ask questions that are not relevant to the campaign / do not fall under the purview of PR, it doesn't mean that you will get spoken to every day, it also does not mean that your publicist is available to you outside of work hours.

Having a solid understanding of the above will not only help your experience with PR, but it will also help develop your knowledge around who is good to work with and who isn't. Most importantly, having a solid understanding of the above allows you to lean in and develop your own practices internally as an artist before feeling the need to engage with PR. When outsourcing to a publicist, take note of their infrastructure, having clear boundaries around start and end dates, as well as an agreement to be signed prior to the campaign that lists all of the major dates and expectations of the campaign are crucial to ensure all parties can be kept accountable.

In the end, PR can play a major role in the awareness of artists but that does not mean it is vital straight away. If you are a local act, ensure to prioritise your own growth first before engaging in a relationship with a publicist to ensure both parties have the best experience possible and hopefully leans into a longer more lasting relationship.