

10 MUSIC PUBLICITY HACKS YOU CAN USE RIGHT NOW

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:: amplify your story ::

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WELCOME: NOW HACK YOUR PR!

While the music industry continues to shapeshift, amplifying your story as a musician or band has become more important than ever. And tastemakers in the media continue to play an important role alongside social media and other direct-to-fan efforts. Press stories get the word out, add legitimacy, and give you something to tell fans. By thinking through the process of music journalism and spending a little time planning and strategizing, you can use these 10 publicity hacks to super-size your (chances of) press coverage.

Most of the ten strategies explained in this e-book can be used when working with a professional publicist or when working on your own. They cost you nothing. Most of them are within reach of an independent artist using StoryAmp (www.StoryAmp.com), a new platform that helps musicians and labels connect with journalists. In fact, some of them are built into the DNA of StoryAmp. We've added a tip for StoryAmp users at the end of each publicity hack.

But you don't have to be using StoryAmp to use this book. Any artist or label can implement these strategies right away.

HACK #1

GET STICKY

Putting out a new album is not enough of a story to get press coverage, unless you already have a significant following within your genre or scene. And hypey adjectives like *groundbreaking* and *best*, and phrases like *rising star* and *take by storm*, are not enough either. Do you think commonly used phrases like *sophomore album* and *sultry voice* will do it? Nope! If you see a cliché, cull it ruthlessly.

Having a good story that people enjoy telling will both capture the imagination of music journalists and ignite word of mouth about you. People repeat and remember what they connect with. Better yet, look for multiple story angles every time you release a new recording or video, or each time you go out on tour or perform in a specific city. Since most artists release an album every year or two, that's a great time to scan your recent experiences, band folklore, repertoire, and fan interactions for possible story angles. First, brainstorm all the possibilities and only then, hone in on the few that stand out enough to be written up and told to the press.

Not sure where to start? Put on these lenses to dive into your own story possibilities:

- **Songs** — Write down one compelling thing about each song on the new album or performance set. It could be lyrics or inspirations; it could be musical sources or cultural ones. It could be a personal story during the creation of the song.

WHAT CAN STORYAMP DO FOR YOU?

If you are planning to release an album or conduct a tour, at no charge you can get them delivered to relevant journalists. It doesn't take long and you end up with a stunning press presentation that has been optimized for music journalists. [Try it out for free now.](#)

- **Instruments** — Think about each instrument used on the recording or on tour. Which ones have a special story (their origin, an alternative technique, how you learned it, etc.)?
- **Fan tales** — It could be something emailed or said online or something that happened at a show. But don't use it if it's cliché.
- **Band drama** — Make it funny, make it sad--from the tour van or in the studio--but it better not be the same thing 10,000 other bands are saying.
- **Personal life** — A lot of musicians are resistant to make it personal. If you can give up the need to be private about everything, you can create a great "public interest" story and give fans a way to emotionally connect with you. Let your personality show through in your art and the way you describe your art. This is a different thing from baring your innermost secrets. You can talk about difficulties, victories, and inspiring experiences as they relate to your music, without spilling the beans about your private life.

Try to make your story angles sticky by following the criteria set forth in the great book *Made to Stick*, by Chip and Dan Heath:

- **Simple** — find the core of any idea
- **Unexpected** — grab people's attention by surprising them
- **Concrete** — make sure an idea can be grasped and remembered later
- **Credible** — give an idea believability
- **Emotional** — help people see the importance of an idea
- **Stories** — empower people to use an idea through narrative

For more on writing a good story about your band for the press, read this [ebook](#).

TIP

STORYAMP

Every place your StoryAmp Dispatches show up, your artist name and concert or release date and concert city will show up. So don't repeat that info in the headline of your Dispatches. Instead pick a compelling short line that will draw in journalists. Think of your Dispatch headline, short pitch, and long pitch as a triangle widening out as you add more information. If you have local connections or stories, add them to each concert market's pitch. Local tie-ins get more attention from local press. But you do not need to change the pitch for each Dispatch in a long tour. In fact, use the Pitch Template to speed up data entry for extended tours. Only tweak for local tie-ins if there are legitimate tie-ins and if you have time. A great story is important, but having the proper lead time is **MORE** important (see Hack #7). **AND DON'T USE ALL CAPS!!!!** (It makes you look like an amateur.)

HACK #2

MESMERIZE WITH EYE CANDY

If band photos and album art have always been an afterthought for your band, you are missing a great opportunity. Good photos and album artwork can mean the difference between coverage in a great media outlet or none at all. And in today's culture of photo and video posts, Pinterest and Instagram, you are visually competing with stunning images that people can produce on a four-inch phone. Your band photos and album cover better look good and represent your image and "brand." Make the image match the stories you've honed in on, if you can.

Even if you cannot hire a professional photographer, if you are not a visual person (that is, you wear whatever t-shirt and jeans are on the top of the pile and you cut your own hair), have that friend with good taste help you pick which photos to use... or better yet, have her take them!

Sometimes you can't get a concert preview that will make or break a show, but the right photo will turn your concert into *the* concert spotlight in a weekly newspaper's calendar section. Make sure to have hi-res photos available (usually 300 DPI and at least 8 inches wide, will do the trick).

A variety of photo options is also helpful for media outlets. If possible, account for all of the following so a designer can plug you into more locations:

- album cover *and* artist photos
- vertical rectangles, horizontal rectangles, and square photos
- color and black & white

- darker images and lighter images
- extra credit: photos with a perfectly white background (this can help an art designer make your image pop out of the page)

Keep in mind that photos expire. If you successfully get photos placed in various media outlets, you need new ones every 6-12 months to continue getting your imagery used in media. In other words, journalists outside your home turf will want to see new photos just about each time you come around for a tour or with a new album.

You can take things one step further with great videos. There are many online media outlets -- some are online only or some are the online version of mainstream print or broadcast outlets (which, by the way, frequently have *separate* editors from their traditional counterparts) -- that will only cover you if you have a music video. Given that most people are consuming videos on crappy, tiny low-res screens, here is a place you *can* cut corners. You'll know when it's time to invest five figures in a video.

And while we are on the topic of aesthetics... unique or high quality packaging of a physical album can get you extra coverage as well. The digital equivalent is making your band website stand out as well (that doesn't mean use fancy Flash intros that anger people or do not show up in some browsers, nor forcing first-time visitors to hear your latest single without hitting a play button); though we've never heard of a band getting media coverage because their website was pretty.

TIP

STORYAMP

Make sure your default image is your nicest one, since that is the image that shows up first. If you only have the Free Account on StoryAmp, you only get one photo or video. If you make it a video, it has the benefit of giving journalists one-click audio.

HACK #3

GET ON STAGE

Having live shows increases your chances of media coverage; plain and simple. Almost anyone can record an album on their computer, pay to have it mastered, and plunk down a thousand bucks to press a first run of CDs (or, for even less money, have a digital download). To get on a stage of any note, at least one other person has to say “OK, yeah, I’ll take a risk with this band.”

Open mic night barely counts, but even so, in a small town, that might be the only entertainment going on, which becomes newsworthy in itself. But we mean playing at a real venue where it costs money to get in. So, if possible, get some dates booked before you hire a publicist or do your own personal press push.

Even a couple of concerts in decent-sized cities will build momentum and increase the number of outlets that will inherently be interested in covering you. And, while we are on the topic, second-tier cities still have great media outlets and are less competitive for media coverage. So don’t rule them out. Getting in the New York Times is really tough to do. Even getting a listing in the New Yorker is competitive. Papers like the Boston Globe, Chicago Tribune, and the Washington Post are within reach.

On a side note, you might be thinking that you could play on one of the emerging online venues — a live show from your living room on the Internet — as a means to getting press. It’s a great way to play to your existing fans and to keep working towards your 10,000 hours towards mastery (see Malcolm Gladwell’s book *Outliers* for more on this concept),

but so far, unless you are already on their radar for other reasons (fame, local success story, being on the lam), a live Internet concert without an in-person audience is not likely to drive press to cover you. So do it for reasons other than press.

TIP

STORYAMP

Even if you are only using a Free StoryAmp account, add your concerts because StoryAmp includes listings to relevant journalist emails even for the free accounts. If you play a ton of gigs in your hometown, don't publicize them all; just target the press when something special is happening. Otherwise, none of your concerts will seem special. And we know you are special!

HACK #4

WITHHOLD YOUR LOVE WITH EXCLUSIVITY

Giving a specific media outlet an “exclusive” is a higher-level publicity tactic. In other words, instead of blasting the same news to 500 journalists, you might think about the one outlet that will make the most difference for you, or an outlet within your genre or scene that will cement your band’s relationship with them.

Most of the time you already need to have a following of significance or buzz in the street to use this technique, but it is good to know about as you plan publicity over the long term.

You can sometimes convince a smaller or local outlet to do something on you, when they wouldn’t otherwise, by promising exclusivity. Each band will have a different media target for this technique based on how big you are, what scene you are in, who covers that scene, and what your goals are (growing your core base or crossing into another one). Exclusive content could include a news announcement (such as an album, playing a very cool festival, or an emerging collaboration with a big star), a new music video your media target could debut (for a day or week before sharing with others), or an exclusive streaming premiere of your new album.

TIP

STORYAMP

While you cannot target individual media outlets through StoryAmp, you can hold back a video or audio track from StoryAmp and hint at it in the pitch. Then when the right journalist contacts you, you can push them over the edge by offering them an exclusive of some sort. If you have a specific journalist's email address, you can use the Share button of your Dispatch to direct them along with a personal note and a link to additional exclusive material.

HACK #5

ANSWER YOUR F#%~ING PHONE (AND EMAIL)

With all the balls in the air for the modern day artist or manager, especially if you are in the studio or on the road, it's easy to think, "I'll just call that journalist back tomorrow." But a five-minute call now could make or break coverage in a national outlet.

Artists whose managers or publicists call back right away (or take the call on the first try, for that matter) get more press coverage. If you are your own manager or publicist, that means you! Don't blow it by being lazy or overbooked. Even if the call back message is "We just crashed the tour bus and are in the hospital... how urgent is this?"

TIP

STORYAMP

Make sure to put the email address of your most responsive team member in your Artist Profile as your publicity contact. If nobody on your team is responsive by email, create a special publicity email address with the vacation auto-responder always on letting journalists know a mobile phone they need to call for a response.

HACK #6

CONTENT UBIQUITY MAGIC

On a related note, provide everything a journalist needs to cover you, on your website (or that of your publicist). This includes: hi-res artist photos and hi-res album cover art, all tour details (including ticket prices, start time, venue addresses, and ticket phone numbers!), a recent biography, and audio samples and the ability to download (password protected, if needed). A link to this press-optimized website should appear on Facebook and Twitter. This can increase coverage by a midnight-writing journalist or increase accuracy (like mentioning the current album rather than the one from four years ago on your MySpace page).

TIP

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Copy the Share links in your Dispatch dashboard and post them on the press page of your own website or blog.

HACK #7

GET A RUNNING START

These days, many artists say a release date is the date the album shows up from the manufacturer. Don't do that. At the very least, plan your release date to be two months *after* you expect to receive CDs. And if you want magazine coverage, it should be five to six months after the music is mastered. Many monthly magazines need music in hand and a convincing pitch five months before the magazine hits the street.

Even newspapers need enough time to: receive the music (even if in digital form); queue it up among the dozens or hundreds of other musicians competing for their attention; get reminded by your (acting) publicist (sometimes you!) that they have it and why they should care; listen to it, make a decision; get buy-in from their editor; produce the piece; and hand it in on time for a designer to lay out the publication. It is very rare that you will get press coverage by announcing a concert to the press a week before the show.

Two weeks advance notice is considered last minute notice in the music journalism business. Yes, there are some exceptions online. But why take the gamble?

TIP

STORYAMP
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Make sure to get your concert and release Dispatches into StoryAmp seven weeks before they happen.

HACK #8

SUBVERT THE INTERVIEW

Once you do secure an interview, never answer a question with a single-word answer. A boring interviewee leads to a boring story... if you're lucky! (It could lead to *no* story.)

Sometimes journalists have been assigned something out of their knowledge area (another genre or "beat," or maybe they are filling in for someone). Sometimes they are doing the jobs of three people and just don't have the time to prepare properly. Or maybe they are having a bad day or are simply lazy. Whatever the reason, it does happen that journalists ask the wrong questions; questions that trigger boring or cliché responses; or questions that are based on misinformation.

Be prepared to gently re-direct the questions or the conversations to a subject that you feel will liven up the conversation and resulting story. This can be done subtly with statements like "Sure that kind of thing happens all the time, but one time I did have a fan who..." Or it can be done more directly, such as, "I don't have much to say about that, but did you know that I..." Journalists are usually looking for a good story, so give it to them even if they don't ask the right way.

Similarly, if the inquiry is a simple yes or no question, proactively expand on the most interesting aspect of the topic. An interview is a give-and-take, and you don't have to follow the journalist's lead passively. Be an active participant and give your interviewer great material.

TIP

STORYAMP
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Think about what questions you will likely be asked, and when you get that email via StoryAmp, be ready! If you already have a hunch of a topic journalists are going to want to cover, but that you do not shines the best light on you... have a few re-direct statements at the ready.

HACK #9

PUT YOUR CONTACT EVERYWHERE (I.E. THE BATHROOM WALL)

This one sounds simple, but it's also easy to forget to do: make sure there is a way to contact your manager (or you, if you play that role), or your publicist, everywhere you control. Try to keep it consistent so you know where to look for inquiries, and so people trying to reach you know exactly how to do so.

Places to put basic management/publicist contact info:

- Artist website
- Partner websites (management, booking agent, label, publicist)
- Blog
- Facebook
- Twitter
- Physical album package
- An email to concert presenters when a show gets booked

TIP

STORYAMP

We force you to have your contact info in the right place. Just pick the right responsive person to include.

HACK #10

TAP YOUR LIVE PROMOTERS

For every live show you have booked, whether it's with an independent promoter or something you are producing yourself, ask the promoter or venue if they would be willing to share with you their local press list, so you can get a bigger turn out. In most cases, they will be glad to share. Experienced and organized concert presenters will do this proactively. Others will respond well when you ask. And occasionally a promoter will be proprietary about their list or unresponsive. But it cannot hurt to ask.

Good promoters keep very fresh media lists, but not all of them do, so you will still need to vet the list. Make sure it is current (check for email bounces or even if the outlet is still in print or online) and comprehensive ("I noticed there are no radio stations on this list. Can you suggest what 2-3 stations would be most likely to mention our concert or even have us on day of the show?").

Once you have their press list, use the tips above (lead time, story angles, photos, etc.) to engage with local journalists around your concert. Rock star publicist tip: do NOT add every journalist you get in local markets to your national fan list. Journalists really do not want to know when you are playing gigs on the other side of the country.

Keep in mind that concert presenters *want* to sell more tickets to all their concerts. Or if it is a non-ticketed show (like at a performing arts plaza or during a festival), it is still to the presenter's benefit to have you helping to

promote the reputation of their event, series, or venue.

As soon as a show gets booked, show the concert presenter that you are a team player and want to work hand in hand with them to make for a successful show. This means being responsive to their requests and engaging in any strategy discussions they initiate. It also means giving them what they need far in advance: a handful of physical albums and posters, the ability to offer streams and downloads to their friends in the press, photos, videos, and all the other items mentioned in #6 above. Bringing a CD to soundcheck is not “in advance.” On average, think more like six weeks in advance.

Be the artist that the promoter/presenter/venue publicists love. If you are cool with helping them do their job, they will likely give you extra love with extra PR outreach to their journalist buddies or sharing some media outlet tips or contact info with you.

You can earn extra brownie points with a venue/presenter by providing them with social media love including:

- Tagging their venue in posts/tweets.
- Giving them good social media fodder to share with their Facebook fans and Twitter/Pinterest followers unique photos, videos, links to your influences or favorites (music, food, local hangouts, etc.).
- Responding directly to their audience members who comment on the venue’s social media pages.
- Using social media to connect with the LOCAL scene (mention a bar or coffee shop you like near the venue, publicly hope that a local band or local celebrity comes out to see your show, etc.).

- Singing the venue's praises if you like their acoustics, aesthetics, marketing, artist-treatment, location, food/drink, etc.

How can you optimize press coverage when you play at a festival? Press coverage when you play at a festival can sometimes be very easy or it can be very tricky. It's easy if local or even national media already dig the festival. Local press will frequently cover *all* the artists at a local festival that is well-loved within its community. At these festivals, you are guaranteed coverage. You may end up with a nice visual spread with your photo or a good press quote to use down the road. But in terms of the fan experience, you might end up "buried" alongside one or two dozen other artists. On the other hand, if you are playing at a large festival (read: SXSW or CMJ, for example) with hundreds or thousands of performers -- and you are not already a headlining act -- it can be very hard to get ANY attention. Here are some suggested tips for how to increase your chances of press coverage at festivals:

- Compelling photos that are sitting in easy reach to the journalist can make you end up being the literal poster-child of a festival.
- Having the most compelling story angle at a festival can also do the same. Don't assume you are going to get buried. Try to be the "breakout" band before you even show up in town!
- Festival publicists struggle to get all the materials they need from each artist. Make it easy on them: give them what they need early, check in occasionally, and even provide a schedule of your interview availability in the weeks before the festival. Don't swamp them with calls, but help them keep you in a positive light and at the top of their mind so that when a radio station asks "who do you suggest I do a phoner with?," they think of you!
- When you don't have formal performance or soundcheck

responsibilities, hang out at the press tent or press table helping to augment the experience for the publicist and the press. Be a part of the team helping out. You WILL score press this way.

TIP

STORYAMP

Give concert presenters the share link to your StoryAmp Dispatches.

IN CLOSING

GOOD STRATEGIES REGARDLESS

Regardless of *where* you are in your career as a musician, these are strategies you can use to increase your presence in the media. Most of these strategies cost little or nothing in terms of financial outlay. They merely take strategic thinking, planning, and a little bit of sweat. Most of these strategies work hand in hand with your career development any way, so while things like developing a narrative rich in story angles, integrating that into your album packaging, or like booking live shows, will help you get more press coverage, they also serve to help you increase and engage your fan base, diversify your revenue streams, and raise your profile, *even if you do not secure any additional press*. Remember that the only thing that guarantees being in the media is paying for an ad. Everything else only helps increase your chances of press coverage. Try out the strategies above and please let us know how it pans out for you by contacting us here: <http://support.storyamp.com>.

READY TO AMPLIFY YOUR STORY ON STORYAMP?

Now that you are thinking like a publicist, what's missing? You need access to *relevant* journalists, a place to host press-optimized content, and a way to send your music to them. StoryAmp.com offers ALL of those things for free! [Sign up now](#) with no commitment.

SPECIAL DISCOUNT FOR CD BABY ARTISTS!

CD Baby artists get a 20% discount on the StoryAmp Premium Account, which makes your concert announcements stand out in emails to the press in each concert market, by setting up your account here:

www.storyamp.com/cdbaby

In addition, CD Baby users may try a Premium Account for one month free using the promo code: cdb2012

About StoryAmp.com

StoryAmp is a new way to connect musicians and journalists. You can add your concert and release info to the StoryAmp website and the system will automatically send the info to journalists interested in your respective concert cities and genres. The journalist will hear about your concert or release three times before each concert or release (if you get the info entered at least six weeks in advance). There are tools for journalists to quickly identify what interests them and interact with musicians of interest. It's a robust suite of publicity tools designed for the new music industry. StoryAmp was designed by renowned music publicity veterans and built by the crack technology team at SproutBox (www.SproutBox.com).

About the author

Dmitri Vietze is the founder and CEO of StoryAmp. He has been a music publicist for fourteen years, having worked with every major label and dozens of tastemaking independent record labels. He and his companies rock paper scissors, FlipSwitch PR, and now StoryAmp have placed over 500 artists in hundreds of media outlets including Letterman, Leno, Rolling Stone, Spin, Fader, People, Time, Newsweek, New York Times, NPR Morning Edition, All Things Considered, Fresh Air, Conde Naste Traveler, New Yorker, Wall Street Journal and many more. His enthusiasm for the emerging generation of self-motivated musicians and independent labels is catchier than the crazy pants he wears. Google it. You will know him, when you see him.

About CD Baby

CD Baby, the world's largest digital distributor of independent music, is a company run BY musicians FOR musicians. We've paid out more than \$200 million to DIY artists all over the world. From our humble beginnings in 1998 as a small, one-man operation in a garage, to our current standing as one of the most trusted names in independent music, we've developed a host of services to help artists, including physical and digital distribution, warehousing and shipping of CDs, DVDs, and vinyl, promotional tools including our MusicStore on Facebook and Music Store widget, affordable web-hosting and design, download cards, and disc duplication.

Click [HERE](#) to become a CD Baby artist today.