

Creating a press pack

Press packs are a really good tool in your band's publicity arsenal. Chances are you've already started to spread the word using a community website like MySpace or Bebo, but sooner or later you'll want to send something to radio stations and record companies directly.

Do your research

Generally radio stations will ignore CDs sent in unless there's a dedicated new music programme. But if there is you should target them directly. Don't send an e-mail pointing to your Myspace account. As a radio show producer I'm unlikely to spend a lot of time listening to tracks online, and the quality isn't good enough to put on air. If I'm going to broadcast something then I want it on CD.

First impressions count

I know better than to judge a CD by its cover, but not everyone does. Get the first impression right by taking a bit of time over the packaging and presentation of your material.

CDs should be well labelled and packaged in something that looks nice. A scribbled track listing is better than nothing, but not much.

Include a generic press release about the band that gives useful information, gigs, where you're from etc. It's also a good idea to include a personal letter that makes it clear you've taken the time to send this pack in specially. Although that's not always practical.

Writing the press release

Your press release should 'big up' the band and give the reader a reason to listen to the CD. There's a fine line between selling yourself and appearing arrogant. Get a few opinions before you send it out.

SPELLCHECK - Spelling and grammar do matter. It's all about creating the right impression. It helps if you have something in particular to say: new CD, special gig, etc. Do say: What you sound like (nobody likes to be put in a box but this is helpful), where you're from, any big gigs or support, that you're very good.

Don't say: That you have a totally original sound (you probably don't), that you're the best band ever (you're probably not).

There's no perfect press release, but being aware of these points can help you avoid common pitfalls.

Sending your CD

Your CD may be the best recording ever made, the ultimate outpouring of your soul into musical excellence... But there are still a few things you can do to help.

Do a radio edit. If your music contains swearing, or the tracks are very long, creating a radio friendly version is worthwhile. If this isn't an option, at least flag up which tracks contain potentially offensive lyrics.

Make sure there's a clear track listing on the CD, and on the case.

If tracks don't fade out make sure the track ends when the music ends.

Radio station CD players count down so the presenter knows when the track will end.

It's a cruel trick for a song to end when the track has a few seconds to go. If your CD is professionally mastered this should be done at this stage.

Contact details

Make sure you include comprehensive contact details for the band. Don't say "reach us through our website". Give an e-mail address, phone number and even postal address. Don't make it difficult for people to reach you.

A good press pack is full of the obvious but remember that the people you're sending it to don't know who you are, so you have to tell them and give them a reason to care. If all the above seems stupidly obvious and you're already doing it then great. But you'd be amazed how many terrible press packs I receive. And remember that most radio presenters and record company execs get tons of these things through. A bit of care and attention can make yours stand out from the crowd.

Matt Seymour

Presenter - More Raw on BBC Radio York