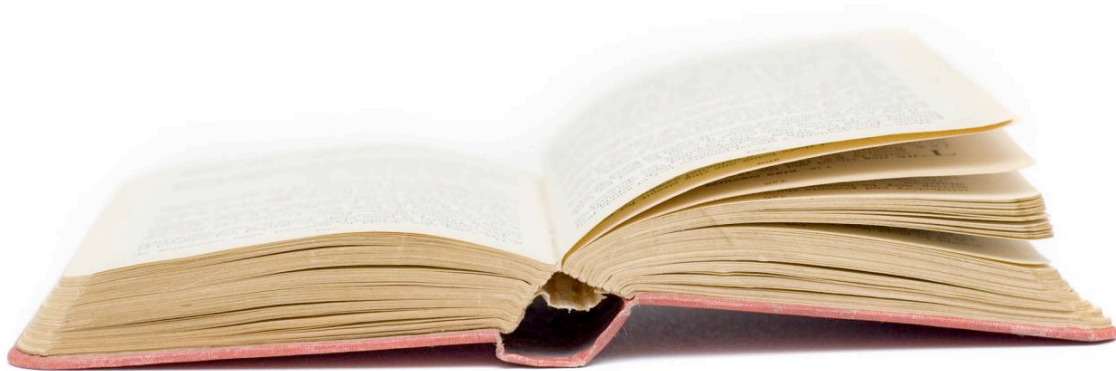


**Talking 'bout a Revolution:
A Manifesto on better understanding the collapse of the music
industry and identifying some ideas and strategies for building
success, amidst so many unknowns in the music business.**

By Ryan Wines, blogger, music connoisseur and leader of
Pet Marmoset and Ryan Wines PR



Author's note: This essay began as an attempt at a simple blog entry, and within only a couple of hours, it quickly developed into something much bigger in size. In an effort to practice what I preach about not over thinking things too much and the value of just getting good content out the door and into public domain, I'm forcing this essay out the door and into this crude pseudo-published form for the sake of "just doing it." Please forgive any grammar and spelling deficiencies it contains, as I promise to clean it up and re-issue it later on, most likely in the form of an eBook. The later edition will also contain proper citations and references, which I hope to not misquote or harm anyone in the meantime. Thank you for reading and sharing this.

Why is everyone so worried about the current state of the music industry? What is so bad about the current state of things? And moreover, given the ginormous ocean of new technology, Web 2.0 capabilities and the unprecedented access to one's audience, why are so many people so reluctant to understand and embrace change?

Never before in the history of human kind have artists had the opportunity to be so connected with an audience and have so many unique and inexpensive mediums to deliver their work. This, in fact, may be the most exciting time ever in world of music. Yes, more exciting than when the first caveman beat two rocks together to make a beat. And yes, even more exciting than when The Beatles played the Ed Sullivan show. What too many artists today are failing to realize is that we are in the midst of a revolution. Let me emphasize this better... WE ARE IN THE MIDST OF A REVOLUTION!! Therefore, seize the moment!

Consider this: There is more music being listened to today than ever before in the history of the universe. Do you understand what that means? Can you truly comprehend the impact of that statement? Give it a minute. Let it really sink in...

While disillusioned music industry traditionalists keep complaining and expressing fear about the implosion and nearly complete devastation of everything that once was in the music business... I think we should celebrate. Yes, celebrate!

Honestly, I think I just don't get it. Why should everyone be so discouraged or fearful about the state of the music industry? The music industry was terrible to begin with. It was the epitome of trickle down economics. The money was all appropriated for a few individuals at the top, in hopes that it would trickle down to the artists. And sure, a few artists fit the blockbuster mold and made the right connections with the right people in the right places at the right times and made it big. Bono knows what I'm talking about. But for the majority of artists, many whom were equally talented considering their available resources, were kept on the sidelines because they just couldn't quite find a way to get into the game. And it most definitely was a game. Now that the old model of the record industry has been pillaged and looted, one can only hope that we never have to go back. In fact, what's happening now is probably the greatest thing to happen to music since the advent of the internet. Yep, I said the internet. But before you get side tracked on that little aside, stay with me a bit longer.

With more music being listened to today than ever before in the history of mankind, one can only conclude that demand for music is at it's peak – right now! People want music more now than ever. They need it. They're demanding it in real, tangible numbers that have never been matched. Now I don't know about you, but this is pretty exciting news to me! In fact, if you are an artist or are in the business of making music, the current demand for music, more than anything, should encourage you to stay strong and keep doing what you're doing: making music.

However, as many of you are quite aware, the fall of the old music industry model has created a fair number of problems for a lot of people. You say problems - I say challenges. Regardless of semantics, people are scared and many are falling victim to despair, discouragement and outright depression over all of it. Heck, I know several artists that, as I type this, have knots in their stomachs over this stuff. Some people are

even contemplating quitting the music industry all together.

To cut to the chase and get at the heart of the matter, the biggest apparent challenge that I can identify is that the music industry is broken and no one has yet discovered a practical model that will allow the typical independent, DIY musician to make money. Are you with me so far?

Let's take a moment to examine "fear" relative to the music business. I recently listened to a podcast where I heard Seth Godin explain that fear is an indicator of change - and change is the first sign of risk. Godin went on to explain that fear is instinctually built into most organisms, primarily intended as a means of survival. In fact, fear is not bad, in and of itself. Therefore, if you're feeling scared, anxious, uncomfortable or disillusioned, my hope is to encourage you. Try to not let the unknown get the best of you. In fact, if possible, try to find confidence in the unknown; if for nothing else, we no longer have the old system to deal with any longer.

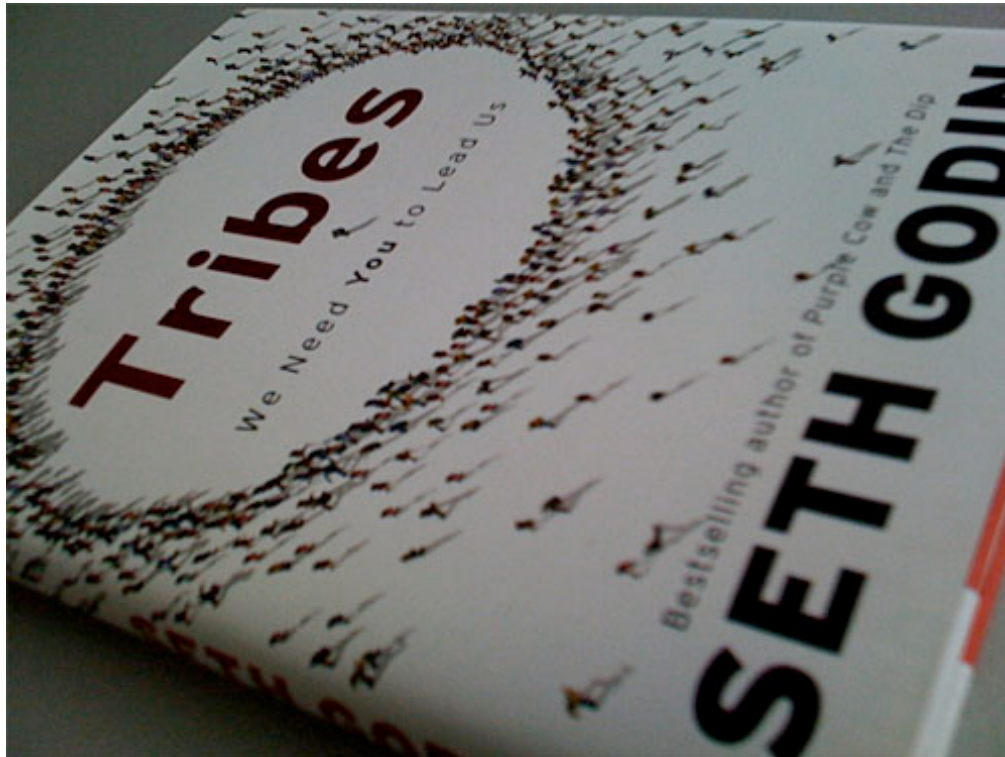
The unknown really isn't so bad. Space travel was pretty hard to imagine even fifty years ago. (Okay, maybe 100 years ago if your name was Robert Goddard). Nowadays, space travel sounds easy to most of us, right? If you have enough money, you can actually buy a trip to outer-space. People do it all of the time - no exaggeration. Meanwhile an engineer friend of mine was telling me the other day about a 3-D printer he's currently designing and it actually has the potential to work sort of like the transporter room on Star Trek. No joke. The bottom line here is to not let the unknown bother you too much. Instead, we should be celebrating the fall of the old system. A terrible old system. Here's to that!

I was listening to the CD Baby DIY Musician podcast the other day while they were announcing some interesting new statistics. A market research company - The NPD Group - released some new data about the current state of the music industry. Among other things, they found that CD sales are continuing to decline. Big surprise, huh? They also found that purchases of online digital music downloads increased by 29 percent since last year and now account for 33 percent of all music tracks purchased in the U.S.. Again, that's not a big surprise - more people are buying music online than in brick and mortar outlets. As a side note, I don't understand why more artists aren't selling their music themselves on their own websites, Myspace page, Facebook page, etc. With PayPal, E-Junkie.com, and other easy solutions available, you're missing out on some easy money if you aren't selling direct. It's a no brainer.

Also according to the NPD research group, there is evidence that music listening is increasing. For example, awareness and usage of Pandora doubled year-over-year to 18 percent of all Internet users... and one-third of those who were aware of Pandora actually report using the service. Similarly, the percentage of consumers claiming to listen to music on social networks climbed from 15 percent in the fourth quarter (Q4) of 2007 to 19 percent in Q4 2008. Nearly HALF of U.S. teens are engaging with music on social networks, which is an increase from 37 percent a year ago. And among college-age Internet users, the percentage increased from 30 percent in 2007 to 41 percent in 2008. This is big news people! This is especially big news if you're an independent, DIY artist. Let me explain why...

Here's what I'd like to identify as the "ah-ha" moment of this essay. While the old system of the music industry has fallen and there are virtually more unknowns than knowns right

now, we must cling to and focus on a few things that we know to be true. And while there are several truths that are all worthy of attention, in my opinion, the most significant truth is the value of understanding and building your audience. Or, as Seth Godin would describe it - it's all about tribes. If you don't know about "tribes" in the marketing sense of the word, go get a copy of Seth Godin's book, "Tribes." Learn it. Memorize it. Execute it. However, "Tribes" in and of itself isn't really the answer. It's more about understanding the basic theory of tribes, and moreover, of relationships and connectivity between two or more people. Honestly, you need to literally "boil it down" to some very basic understandings about humans and how we are wired.



To understand what a tribe is, is to understand that we all have a basic human need to connect with and interact with other human beings. Making friends, interacting with others, sharing our experiences, keeping up on trends and culture, and keeping up with developments in your community are all reasons that we instinctually connect with other humans. In fact, when you connect with other people in a way that spawns a more valuable relationship, the long-term effects of a connection can actually help you and play a pivotal role throughout your life, in addition to giving you pleasure and happiness. From Seth Godin's book, "Tribes" he more specifically defines a tribe this way:

"A Tribe is a group of people connected to one another, connected to a leader, and connected to an idea. For millions of years, human beings have been part of one tribe or another. A group needs only two things to be a tribe: a shared interest and a way to communicate."

On a very basic level, I believe the devastation of the old ways of the music industry, and

the revolution that has now commenced, will drive artists and musicians to return to (or relearn) some very basic, very human instincts. **And I further believe that focusing on and developing new ways to connect with your audience and build your tribe, is the most practical and effective path to success.**

Oh, and remember my earlier aside, praising the advent of the internet? Well, the internet is the single biggest platform available for building tribes and connecting with your audience. But first, a little more context...

Before the music industry imploded, it was mainly based on a "push" model. As I compared it to trickle down economics before, it was a few wealthy and influential people controlling nearly everything. If only they would have used their power for good...but alas, they didn't. More often than not, the elite few decided what was popular and they pushed the music they wanted out to the masses. In fact, consumers virtually had no choice in the matter. Just as the Chris Anderson's "Longtail" theory explains, there was very limited shelf space for records, so consumers could only choose based on a very limited offering. Actually, there was very little choice involved. Radio works the same way. It's an entire kingdom ruled by a few wealthy people who just keep getting richer. Or at least they were...before the music industry imploded. But what about tribes back in the old days? Mainstream artists had fans, right? Heck, Tom Petty is born of the old system and I dig Tom Petty just as much as I dig The Arcade Fire. So yes, people did form tribes around mainstream music. And occasionally, as in the case of Tom Petty, some more mainstream artists were worthy of commanding large, loyal tribes. If you haven't had the chance to watch "Running Down a Dream" - the newer Tom Petty documentary, you should. It will give you a good look at the old system and some perspective into what the music industry used to be like. Moreover, it's just a dynamite documentary - one of the best I've ever seen.

Back to the topic of tribes... Did mainstream artists in the old system have tribes? Yes, they certainly did. But many of them were sort of fake and contrived. Fans were merely drinking the kool-aid that the elite, wealthy industry executives were selling. Fans were passionate about music and grabbed on to the best they could find. Consumers formed tribes around mainstream music because it was all they had. In my mind, it's sort of like The Wizard of Oz...and the record company executives were the guys behind the curtain, creating a tightly controlled, phony illusion...where we consumers starred as Dorothy and Toto.

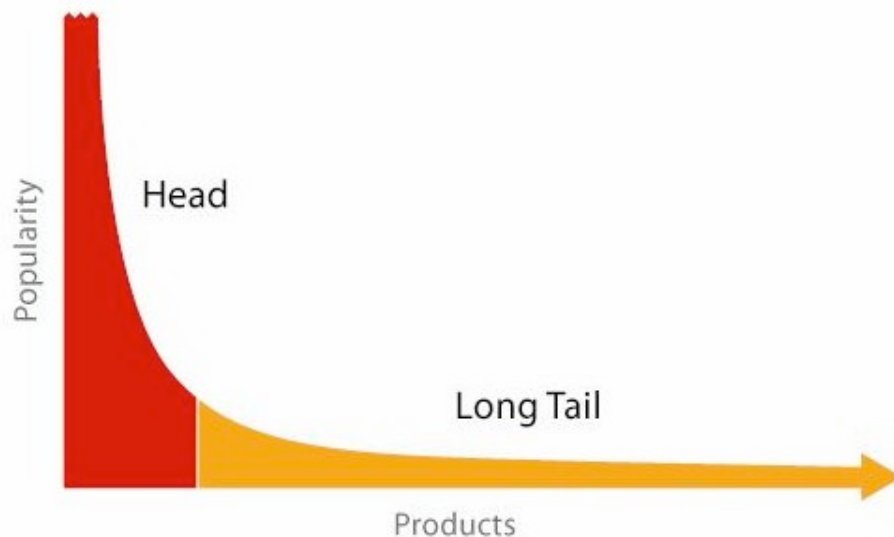
And then came the internet. If you do the research, build a timeline, and piece together all events around the decline of the old music industry, you'll find that the internet had the most significant impact on the record industry's demise. You see, when the internet came along, suddenly online retailers like Amazon and iTunes began providing virtually unlimited shelf space and allowing music enthusiasts the choice to discover and purchase anything they pleased. Finally, consumers were freed of the "push" marketing strategy of the record industry.

Freed of their shackles and with unlimited choice, consumers soon began developing their own tastes and musical preferences. People soon stopped buying what the wealthy industry elite were selling, and instead, they developed their own identities. Music fans quickly ventured out to the fringes to discover and buy what they wanted, eventually forming new tribes. These tribes were real and organic. They happened naturally. A music fan could actually hear a song in a coffee shop or in a friend's car or even purely

by word-of-mouth and could then go directly to the store (ie: online retailers) and purchase the music that they wanted. The "Longtail" was the result, rendering a "blockbuster" album soon extinct and opening up a whole new market for independent, DIY artists.

The phrase The Long Tail (as a proper noun) was first coined by Chris Anderson in an October 2004 Wired magazine article to describe the niche strategy of businesses, such as Amazon.com, iTunes or Netflix, that sell a large number of unique, niche items, each in relatively small quantities. Anderson elaborated the Long Tail concept in his book, *The Long Tail: Why the Future of Business Is Selling Less of More* – a book that I highly recommend.

A frequency distribution with a long tail — the concept at the root of Anderson's coinage — has been studied by statisticians since at least 1946. The distribution and inventory costs of these businesses allow them to realize significant profit out of selling small volumes of hard-to-find items to many customers, instead of only selling large volumes of a reduced number of popular items. The group that purchases a large number of "non-hit" items is the demographic called the Long Tail. Given a large enough availability of choice, a large population of customers, and negligible stocking and distribution costs, the selection and buying pattern of the population results in a power law distribution curve. This suggests that a market with a high freedom of choice will create a certain degree of inequality by favoring the upper 20% of the items ("hits" or "blockbusters") against the other 80% ("non-hits" or "long tail").



Soon, as the old music industry started its sudden and violent decline, technology simultaneously continued to advance at an equally fast pace, and eventually it even ushered in new, industry-shattering online outlets like Napster, Limewire, and other free file sharing mediums that have kept the RIAA quite busy over the past six or seven years. While I hope we all can agree that music piracy is a bad thing, in due time I believe it is possible that we may learn that, in the big scheme of things, it was a necessary evil, playing an integral role in the fall of the old music industry and the

revolution of what lies ahead. Time will tell... (Please don't kill the messenger.)

You see, some would argue that freeing up digital music to "piracy" and free file sharing has the ability to empower an unbelievably powerful network of like-minded people (i.e. fans and influencers), who pull content such as free MP3s and then "evangelize" on behalf of the musicians by spreading messages by electronic word of mouth. While I do not support free file sharing or piracy, I have seen many artists become very successful as a result. This is particularly worth taking note of. Additionally, outside of "piracy" methods, free authorized MP3 sharing is currently playing an integral role in promoting new music and artists. Simply check out stereogum.com, pitchforkmedia.com, largeheartedboy.com or my own website at petmarmoset.net/blog to see how musicians are using free MP3's to promote their music.

Welcome to the digital age of the music industry. This is the time when everything has been turned upside down and nobody is quite sure what to do or what structure or process will ultimately rule the kingdom. Sure, some have already found success among the current mess...plotting forward using some older, traditional techniques and methods, dovetailed to some degree, with some new ones. Spoon, Death Cab for Cutie, The Arcade Fire, Connor Oberst, Bon Iver, Iron and Wine, The Decemberists, Band of Horses, and MGMT are a few artists that I enjoy and quickly come to mind as some that are succeeding amidst this mess of unknown times. But truth be told, no one has truly found a new age model that can be repeated and replicated with significant and continued success...and most important for many independent, DIY artists: a financial benefit.

We are currently stuck in the middle of two ages on the timeline of the history of the music industry. The old age is behind us - an age that was terrible for most artists and wonderful for a few, wealthy movers and shakers. The new age is ahead of us - and somewhere among us, there are the "Lewis & Clarks" of our time, bravely heading into the wilderness, taking trails into the darkness and braving the rapids, searching for a new land...for a new hope.

Okay, now lets talk about some solutions.

Now, before you get too overwhelmed or disillusioned in a discussion involving the internet and social media, let me preface things a little bit first. I am merely a student in the world of internet and social media philosophies and I tend to steal and reuse/repurpose other people's ideas and theories to support my own beliefs and arguments. And I say why not? These people have spent a lot more time than I have, thinking about and exploring the impact and value that the internet and social media plays in our world - especially the music world. I'm referring to internet, social media and Web 2.0 thought leaders like Brian Solis, Seth Godin, Chris Anderson and Dave Allen to name only a few.

Before you enter into the social media portion of this essay, I kindly ask that you throw away any preconceived biases or opinions you may have. And no, I'm not going to try to convince you that you need to Twitter 10 times a day. Please, just open your mind and bare with me for a minute...

Humans by nature are interactive beings. We are relational by design. Obviously, some people are more or less relational than others - but we were all designed to interact,

communicate and relate with one another. It's how we are wired. Why are we designed this way, you ask? Well, while I personally believe that to be a worthwhile question to ask yourself, I'll leave that one for you to wrestle with on your own. In any event, it's hard to argue against the fact that we are interactive, relational beings.

Dave Allen of Gang of Four and pampelmoose.com fame describes it this way:

"To understand and embrace social networking is to place the idea that says 'technology makes this possible' to one side and embrace the idea of the basic human need to stay in touch with other like-minded people at all times. As Clay Shirky says 'The desire to be part of a group that shares, cooperates, or acts in concert is a basic human instinct.' Think about rock concerts for a minute.....

Most people that take a position on social networking and advertising come at it from a technological point of view, as in 'technology has created the means for everyone to be connected and to stay in touch.' I disagree with that statement because it removes nature from the game. It is entirely natural for humans to want to interact as often as possible as we are all social animals. Cities are no more artificial (technological) than the hives of bees. Therefore the Internet is as natural as a spider's web. People who believe that technology is driving our interactions are missing the point - we ourselves are technological devices, invented by ancient bacterial communities as a means of genetic survival. Bottom line - social media is as natural as apple pie as we all want to be as connected as possible - we can't help it."

By now, I hope you understand my case that we are all relational beings by nature. I believe the music industry revolution that we are currently in the midst of will demand that we examine this most basic human nature - especially if we want to succeed. The old way - the old music industry model was all fake and built on the wrong values. We were being told what to like and what to buy and I believe that after a couple generations of this carefully orchestrated "Wizard of Oz" type of kingdom, as consumers we became numb and unaware of our own human makeup. We got used to choosing from a limited selection and got comfortable finding joy in whatever music we could get our hands on.



At some point, it got so bad that consumers began embracing the likes of New Kids on the Block and Billy Ray Cyrus and The Backstreet Boys and Brittany Spears. In fact, do you know why we have the term "one hit wonder"? It's because the guys behind the curtain, the music industry big wigs saw dollar signs in singles, rather than believing in and supporting the actual artists or albums or a collection of music. They would push one seemingly fun, catchy song and make millions on it...all the while many of the one hit wonder artists merely got lucky with one hit and little to show for it. Sure, some got paid well. But that's not the point. The point is, if they were one hit wonders, how good were they in the first place? And if not for a few money hungry elitists pulling all of the strings, how successful would these artists have truly been? The old music industry was building a false economy. It was bound to break at some point. Thankfully, it crashed.

Now, with the apocalypse of the music industry and the perpetual tidal wave of innovative technology, our world has changed. The music world has changed. As consumers, we are finally discovering what it's like to form our own preferences and to form our own tribes, without being told what to buy or what to listen to. A person can be completely free from the time of birth to truly discover and build their own musical tastes and preferences, without some controlling, god-like establishment taking choice away from them.

Now, not only can we have whatever sort of music we want, we also have virtually unlimited mediums for interacting, connecting and relating with other humans. This is truly a beautiful thing. It's especially beautiful for independent, DIY artists who want to connect with people and develop their tribe. In fact, with applications like Twitter, Facebook, Blogs, iPhones, text messages, Web 2.0 and other tools, it's possible to actually build real, healthy and productive relationships online in ways that have never been possible before. This is great news, and in my opinion, possibly the most important call to action for musicians and artists everywhere.

As Brian Solis recently put it:

"Relationships...RELATIONSHIPS...count for everything here, and they're measured by the mutually beneficial rewards that all parties experience over time. We invest in each other and harvest the fruits of our collaboration and interconnection.

I follow you on Twitter!

We're Facebook friends!

I "like" you all the time on FriendFeed!

I subscribe to your RSS feed!

It may seem surreal, but it's fascinatingly real and momentous.

We're forging new and relevant links online. It's the metamorphosis from online to offline that validates and certifies connections and symbolizes true opportunity to develop genuine relationships.

We're putting faces to avatars while in person exchanges of emotions and sincerity replace emoticons.

I guess that's the point of this post. It's...more about the magic that transcends online relationships into real world friendships – whether professional or personal. And, it drinks like a glass of wonderfully aged, rich red wine that flirts with our senses, soothes our soul, makes us a little smarter, and tantalizes our being with every sip.

Each smile, hug, debate, gesture, token, handshake, nod, and conversation, dictates the potential and direction of that bond...

We're bound by context and the digital conversations that we weave transpire through the physical collective and exchange of ideas and contact. Events centralized around your interests and passions, and the people that unite those around them, are omnipresent and ripe for your participation. Find or host a local tweetup or meetup. Attend or organize a local barcamp. Find professional conferences designed to help you improve how you engage.”

Our actions online and in the real world define our character, establish authority, and attract corresponding personalities and personas that elucidate our social graph. It's what we represent in this world that determines our place within it.

The Social Economy is rich in collaboration and friendship. We are defining a new era of society and how we ultimately communicate with one another. The tools may affect how we correspond, but the dynamics of human relationships are constant and live and breathe through the sincere nuances of our actions. This is about the art of building, converting, and fostering meaningful relationships online > offline > and online again - in between the next physical encounter.

And all at once, you look up and find yourself surrounded by those who inspire you. This is your time to shine.

If you haven't checked out Brian Solis' blog, I encourage you to do so. You'll learn more about Twitter and online communications than you ever thought possible. He is years ahead of everyone else and is a worthwhile pioneer to follow and learn from. Even if you're like me and only comprehend and retain about 10% of what he says on his blog (briansolis.com), you will have a significant advantage and will be much better equipped at succeeding during this unknown time in the music industry.

According to Wikipedia.com, "Web 2.0" refers to a perceived second generation of web development and design, that aims to facilitate communication, secure information sharing, interoperability, and collaboration on the World Wide Web. Web 2.0 concepts have led to the development and evolution of web-based communities, hosted services, and applications; such as social-networking sites, video-sharing sites, wikis, blogs, and folksonomies.

With the advent of the internet and more importantly, Web 2.0, the world has truly opened up allowing for nearly complete and direct access to everyone in the world. Yes, there are those in less developed, less fortunate parts of the world that are left out of this

equation...but soon even they will be online. If roughly one-third of the world's population has a cell phone, I would wager that it won't be long before nearly everyone has access to the internet. And as music continues to evolve and grow as a digital medium...and with more music being listened to today than ever before in the history of mankind, I think you can see where I'm going with this...

There was once a day when if a musician wanted to promote their music and get the word out about what they're doing, they would dream of Rolling Stone, Top 40 radio play, and distribution at Tower Records. Who knows, maybe they were really ambitious and had a music video they hoped would land on MTV. Only as little as four or five years ago, these media outlets were widely considered to be the ultimate prize in exposure.

But what about today? When was the last time you listened to a Top 40 radio station? When was the last time you watched music videos on MTV? When was the last time you walked into a national record store chain? How often do you discover new music in Rolling Stone?

Today, I would rather an artist land on the front page of Stereogum.com or Pitchforkmedia.com than have a video on MTV. **Believe it or not, people today are discovering new music more by word-of-mouth, music blogs, and social media networks than by any other source.** This too is great news for independent, DIY musicians because it means publicity and exposure is much more attainable and much less expensive than ever before.

This again supports the fact that "push" marketing doesn't work in today's economy. The pendulum has swung to the consumers, empowering them to make their own decisions and "pull" whatever they want, whenever they want. Music blogs are perfect for this because of their nature. Generally speaking, blogs are interactive and allow the audience to weigh-in and be part of the conversation. Truth be told, consumers actually own the conversation. Music blogs merely provide a place and a venue for the conversation to take place. Thus, when an artist gets one of their songs posted on a popular music blog, it's inviting the audience to interact with the music. They can "pull" the song from the blog if they choose and they can voice their opinions. Suddenly, this concept of understanding our most basic human instinct of connecting, interacting, and being in relationship with other people intersects with music. This is the essence of how one can utilize the internet and social media to build and develop their tribe.

“Evolution is evolution - and it's happened before us and will continue after we're gone. But, what's taking place now is much more than change for the sake of change. The socialization of content creation, consumption and participation, is hastening the metamorphosis that transforms everyday people into participants of a powerful and valuable media literate society.” -Brian Solis

Using mediums such as blogs (your blog or other people's blogs), Twitter, Facebook, email, text messaging, Myspace, social media networks, mobile phones and others - you can easily evangelize your music out to the masses, in very real, personal, and relational ways. Trust me, utilizing the internet to connect with and grow your fan base is not as sterile and impersonal as it may sound. Just ask Johnny Clay, an artist I work with, who regularly utilizes his band's blog, email newsletter, Twitter, Facebook, and Myspace to connect with his tribe. Johnny is the songwriter and front man for The Dimes - a northwest-based independent band that regularly tours the west coast. Through the

frequent and strategic use of these social mediums, he's been able to develop very real, very sincere, and mutually beneficial relationships with hundreds of fans. Check out The Dimes' blog at www.thedimes.com/blog or subscribe to the band's email list and see first hand, one example of what it looks like to utilize these methods to successfully build and develop a tribe.

Kevin Kelly, self-proclaimed "Senior Maverick" at Wired Magazine, puts it all into perspective this way:

"Young artists starting out in this digitally mediated world have another path other than stardom, a path made possible by the very technology that creates the long tail. Instead of trying to reach the narrow and unlikely peaks of platinum hits, bestseller blockbusters, and celebrity status, they can aim for direct connection with 1,000 True Fans."



The beauty of Web 2.0 and social networks is that, like the Long Tail model, it breaks up the mediums of communication, allowing people to choose what works best for them. Hence, the wide variety of social communication networks, including the likes of Twitter, Facebook, Blogs, Myspace, Email, Text Messaging, mobile phone apps, and other.

However, one of the bigger challenges for artists today is tracking all of these communication platforms and mediums, locating your tribe, and interacting with them where the dialogue is actually taking place. Ideally, you will be available and present on Twitter, on Facebook, in the Blog community, etc. so you can engage with, communicate with, and ultimately compel (lead) your tribe. If this seems as overwhelming to you as it is to me, I suggest starting small with only one or two of these mediums. Gradually, as your comfort level allows and as your knowledge and ability increases, you can add on

more tools and networks, as you wish. Let's be practical: you can't do it all. Thankfully, however, there are some easy and practical ways you can automate some of these tools to work together, in concert, so you don't have to maintain all of them individually.

Take Twitterfeed.com for example. You can set it up to "tweet" every time you post a new blog entry – automatically, without going to Twitter.

My big, heart-felt challenge to all aspiring independent, DIY artists of today is to fully understand that the old music industry model is broken. Stop working within the old model today. Reevaluate your goals and objectives and the processes you use to reach them. Throw all of that away and start with a blank piece of paper. Too many people are clinging to old methods, processes, and ways - unsure, disillusioned, or afraid to move on to something new. The sooner we can move on, CHANGE, embrace reality, and keep a positive attitude moving forward (into the unknown), the sooner we will find a solution and ultimately succeed.

Ask yourself what you're doing and why you're doing it. Are you subconsciously following the old music industry model and processes? Are you truly aware of what you're doing and why you're doing it? If you are chasing agents and labels, Twittering about all of the industry events and Grammy parties you're going to, spending a lot of your time and resources on the possibility of landing one good licensing deal, and are more concerned about having the right look (you know, that LA look!) than building a tribe...then you are completely missing the point. Wake up! We are entering a brand new and completely different era in the history of the music business.

In today's economy, it's all about developing your tribe. It's the absolute most important and most valuable asset that independent, DIY artists can have. If this isn't your #1, top priority, you may want to rethink what you're doing.

Continuing on this theme of the importance of connecting with fans and building a tribe, I am reminded of a quote that I've been using frequently... In the movie Amistad, John Quincy Adams (played by Anthony Hopkins) says something along the lines of, "He with the best story, wins." This concept rings especially true for indie artists. You see, you really aren't selling songs - you are selling something much more, much greater than a song. You are selling an idea...a story...a feeling or emotion....and ultimately, an experience.

Please note that my intent here is not to remove any importance or emphasis from the music. I'll be the first to tell you that the music should always be the core focus of any musician. What I'm saying here is that it's about much, much more than the music alone. It's about beliefs. It's about passion. It's about belonging. Okay, maybe I lied before... THIS IS THE "AH-HA" MOMENT of this essay.

Give your audience something to believe in! Give them something they can be part of and participate in. Compel them. Involve them. Regularly interact with and communicate with them. Inspire them. Lead them!

I would even argue that most music fans don't buy a song or a record or a concert ticket because of any real value that these individual, tangible items have. They buy your music or a ticket to your show because they want to be part of something - something they believe in.

People want to be part of something. They want to experience something and feel something. While your music certainly plays a central and integral role in things, and can compliment or contribute to defining who you are or what kind of community you are leading, your music is not, by itself, the whole enchilada. You must be able to inspire, compel, build, develop and ultimately lead your tribe. Here is another excerpt from Seth Godin's book, Tribes, further supporting the theory and importance of tribes:

“Forty years ago, Jerry Garcia and the Grateful Dead made some decisions that changed the music industry forever. You might not be in the music business and you may never have been to a Dead concert, but the impact the Dead made impacts almost every industry, including yours.

In addition to grossing hundreds of millions of dollars during their career, the Dead helped us understand how tribes work. They didn't succeed by selling records (they only had one top 40 album). Instead, they succeeded by attracting and leading a tribe.

Human beings can't help it. We need to belong. One of the most powerful and successful survival mechanisms we have at our disposal is to be part of a tribe, to contribute to (and take from) a group of like-minded people. We are drawn to leaders and their ideas, and we can't resist the rush of belonging or the thrill of the new.

When one deadhead says to another, "2-14-70," it's like a secret code. The smiles and the hugs and handshakes define who we are... being in a tribe is a big part of how we see ourselves.

We want to belong not to just one tribe, it turns out, but to many. And if you give us tools and make it easy, we'll keep joining.

Tribes make our lives better, and leading a tribe is the best life of all.”

In conclusion, if you are an independent artist or band and are feeling confused, overwhelmed or disillusioned by how you should approach the music business given the current apocalyptic state of the music industry, fear not. Forget the old music industry model and stop doing things the old way. Rethink what you're doing and why you're doing it. Ask questions. Challenge old rules and old systems. Focus on connecting to and interacting with your fans in new ways. Offer them something to be excited about. Build a tribe. Lead a tribe with compelling ideas, experiences and yes, music. Take risks. Try ideas and strategies that others think are crazy. And as overwhelming and disillusioning as it all may seem - **bravely move forward into the unknown.**

-Ryan

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