

Do you have great music and want to score a record deal? Or have you always wondered how artists got through to big labels and ended up getting signed? In this post, I will teach you my foolproof method for scoring a record label deal and set you up with a sweet checklist of to-do's which you can pick up right here.

It's a little unconventional and it requires hard work, but it sure as hell works. With this approach, I have signed tracks of hardly known artists to internationally reputed labels. Even when the artists and I were just freshly starting out in the game.

## The Fundamentals

Before you do anything, we have to sort out the basics. These are the things that have to be right before you even attempt getting in touch with [a record label](#).

### The Music

This is where it all begins and is **the** essential part of the puzzle. You have to make sure that your music is absolutely mind-blowingly awesome. These are steps you should take to guarantee it truly is.

**Comment [1]:** The album I produce for my final product could be a good demo.

### Get feedback

Whenever you reach that point on a track where you think that it's ready to send it to a record label, you need to pause and ask for feedback.

Send it over to people whose opinion you value, but not your friends or relatives. They will likely be yeah-sayers. You don't need that. You need hard criticism.

**Comment [2]:** This feedback can come from mentors.

Take it all in and work with it. Not everything that others consider wrong with it has to be corrected, but if you get multiple people pointing out the same things, it should start ringing some bells.

### Polish the sound

Now that you have ironed out most of the track's issues, you need to make sure it sounds as good as it possibly can – I'm talking about mixing and mastering here. These final touches can make a world of difference.... even if you're not great at it, a decently mixed and mastered track is going to sound miles and miles better than one that's not.

**Comment [3]:** Many contacts can help mix.

Now, if you're a producer, then you probably know how to put down a decent mix and master. If not, then I highly suggest you either send your polished track over to a friend who does know this stuff, get it sent over to an audio engineer or learn how to do this yourself.

**Comment [4]:** This is a goal of mine since I am trying to be self-sufficient.

My co-founder over at Heroic, Tim, has written a great [guide on mixing & mastering](#).

## The Presentation

**Comment [5]:** A professional photoshoot can be done to have a professional photo to show professionals.

You know the saying 'First impressions last'? It's true... and highly relevant when you're trying to get signed.

When you manage to get a label to listen to your music, chances are that they are going to catch a glimpse of your online appearance. And if they don't, they will definitely look you up if your music has intrigued them. You want to make sure that the impression you leave is as good as can be.

Here's the minimum of things that you should have sorted out:

## Socials

**Comment [6]:** I believe a soundcloud, twitter, and maybe instagram are good.

Set up accounts under your artist alias on at least Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and SoundCloud. Make your specific URLs the same for each platform... so if you're [www.facebook.com/thebestbandever](http://www.facebook.com/thebestbandever), you want to try and have [www.soundcloud.com/thebestbandever](http://www.soundcloud.com/thebestbandever) too.

Then, interlink everything. All your profiles should have links to your profiles on other platforms, your website, and contact email. If you have a manager you can replace your email with theirs, and if you also have agents you'll want to include their information as well.

You can also throw in a branding marker unique to yourself next to these links to keep your SoundCloud looking interesting.

## Official Website

**Comment [7]:** I wonder if my LSM website can be used for this?

You should have your own .com domain. [It just looks more professional.](#)

**Comment [8]:** It is too bad it costs money.

Now all you need is a website on there... you can build one yourself or run with WordPress or Tumblr if you're not that tech-savvy.

## Branding

**Comment [9]:** Oh, this is something that was discussed in an interview before.

You also have to have an established brand that's visually pleasing as well.

You should have a logo, some decent photographs and possibly artwork for all your releases. Make sure these are all set up correctly on your social media sites and website. If you have mediocre designs or did a

If you have mediocre designs or did a half-assed attempt at crafting something yourself, ditch it. You're better off with no design than ugly design – it looks cheap. Ideally, you want to find a designer who can specifically cater to your needs and with whom you can develop a

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Alternatively, there are a few ways you can get good designs for a reasonable price; you either find a designer whose willing to work with you for free or cheap, or use design competition websites. For the prior, you can browse [EDM producer forums](#) as they often have categories where beginning designers are enthusiastically giving away free designs to practice their trade. Try looking at

**Comment [10]:** They always do have interesting artwork.

For the prior, you can browse EDM producer forums as they often have categories where beginning designers are enthusiastically giving away free designs to practice their trade. Try looking at [EDM District's Community forums](#).

Then there are design competition websites – these are sites where you can post a job offering, for example for a logo design, offer a set price, and a bunch of designers in the website's community will pitch designs to best match your requirements.

Once your job posting expires, you get to choose the design you like the most, and that designer gets the money. Check out [99designs](#) and [Crowdspring](#).

I can't stress enough how essential these basic things are. If you have checked and sorted out everything, you should now have a decent foundation built and you'll look more professional to both labels and fans.

## The Art of A&R

Good labels receive tons of demos. They often have A&R's (Artist & Repertoire) working for them. These are the people that scout talent and listen to the demos. Top notch commercial labels such as Dim Mak, Mad Decent and Spinning Records receive over 100 demos DAILY. These pile up so quickly that it's nearly impossible to keep up with. Some bigger labels go through their demos once a month, but I know of a few who have just given up on checking their general demo boxes and mail folders altogether. Instead, they find and sign music through their network. This is a hugely important notion which I'll treat later in this article.

**Comment [11]:** How does someone stand out against everyone?

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**Comment [12]:** What network is this?

Next to that, there's something else that's becoming increasingly important – independent power.

With the rise of all the social networks and other online tools, it's easier than ever to market yourself independently as an artist.

This effect has come at a cost for labels though... they no longer control the only channels through which music is distributed and are thus more dependent on the marketing power of artists themselves. As a result, labels are increasingly looking for artists that would be able to make it 'big' by themselves; with big and dedicated fan bases, unique marketing styles and great ways of branding themselves. This is becoming a hugely important part of the equation.

**Comment [13]:** Social media will help connect with listeners and maybe create a fan base.

They want to pick up the acts that could go 'viral' without them.

As an artist looking for a deal, you should be aware of these cornerstones. Great music is rarely all it takes when you're looking to get signed. That's just the reality. To illustrate, Deadmau5's label Mau5trap stated earlier that they no longer sign artists

To illustrate, Deadmau5's label Mau5trap stated earlier that they no longer sign artists who are not totally self-sufficient, regardless of musical quality.

The more aware you are, the better you can prepare yourself.

### **The Pitch**

**Comment [14]:** This can utilize my presentation skills.

Before we get to the real work, it's essential that you determine exactly who you're going after.

### **The Groundwork**

**Comment [15]:** Many of these steps are reminding me of ISM/

Make a top five list of the labels that you'd want to release with the most. It is important that these labels are compatible with your music... it's pointless to send dubstep to an indie rock label. You know what I mean.

The more your music fits their style, the better. Create this list on your computer using Word, Excel, Evernote or something alike.

Then, track them down. Research all the places where the labels are located.

For each of them, find their YouTube channel, SoundCloud, Facebook Page, Twitter account, website and email addresses.

### **Setting yourself apart**

Here comes the hard part. This is the most time consuming step of this whole process and needs to be executed with a lot of persistence and attention to detail.

Earlier we discussed how the bigger a label gets, the more demos they receive. Their A&R's will hardly pay attention to the public demo folder and are more inclined to sign tracks that they've gotten through their own network, discovered on the web or by visiting shows. Sometimes that public folder is only checked once a month. By an intern.

Assuming you're doing everything you can to have the best music, marketing, branding and social media going that you possibly can, there's one single thing that you can do that will make a world of difference – **Make friends with the right people.**

Growing these relationships can be a tough task though. Particularly if they're brand new.

Especially early in the relationship, you'll need to interact to *build familiarity*.

**Comment [16]:** I guess this is through gaining those connections.

Constantly.

People tend to recognize things, be it brands or faces, once they've seen them 2 or 3 times. That means that you'll probably only be recognized from the point where the label has seen your name come around about three times.

If you've managed to strike up dialogue, be sure to show *genuine interest*.

Focus on the other person. Avoid talking about yourself. Ask relevant questions.

Research what they've been up to – social media is great for that. Act on that.

People tend to do more for people they like. This is what we call goodwill. Foster it.

You increase the rate with which you gain this by adding value in your interactions with people.

Give them ideas, criticism, links or comments that could benefit them. Point out something they could have missed. Put in some effort. Make life better for them. They'll appreciate you for it.

Remember most of all – *fortune favors the bold*.

*Don't feel afraid to connect with people*, regardless of their status, or if they are strangers to you. Good things come from those little risks.

**Comment [17]:** Unfortunately, shyness is a weakness I have to overcome.

You should apply all of these principles in many of your business relationships. Especially if you want to collaborate with someone, these things go a long way.

## Submitting Music

We're finally here! You get to submit some music.

This is the easiest of all the steps we've discussed.

I'll run you through this process in three steps; the (un)spoken rules, preparing for the submission and actually sending it in.

### The (Un)spoken Rules

**Only submit finished, unsigned, unpublicized original material** – that excludes [all remixes](#), edits, reworks, works in progress and also everything you've uploaded somewhere publicly already.

**Comment [18]:** This album isn't under any record label, so this step should be easy.

**Avoid using copyrighted material** – unless you have a potential chart topping #1 hit in your hands, labels are not too eager to release music that contains copyrighted material. Clearing it takes a lot of effort and potentially money. Only the big boys clear stuff. The smaller labels either let it slide and hope they don't get caught, or have to pass on those tracks altogether.

**Comment [19]:** Should sampling be an issue?

**Make it easy for them** – good labels receive a lot of music (yeah yeah I've said that already). Listening to all that music is a pain in the ass. You need to make this process as convenient as possible for them. Also, there's always a chance you're going to be looked over. You need to be precise and persistent to get your stuff heard.

**Quality over quantity** – do not send more than [three tracks](#) at once in a demo submission. If you have more, force yourself to filter out the best. This will increase the odds of the label hearing something that they'll like. The more tracks are in there, the bigger the chance that they won't hear your best work immediately, or that it seems like a huge task to go through everything. If you want to submit an EP or Album, I'd suggest creating interest with the best tracks first.

**Comment [20]:** I do plan to record 3-5 tracks for the EP.

**Everyone wants to feel special** – including the label. Don't send a demo submission to multiple labels at once. Especially not when using a personalized approach like we are. Just imagine what would happen if two of them said yes at the same time. That wouldn't go too well.

**Comment [21]:** This reminds me of applying to college.

## Upload a streaming version and a download

**Comment [22]:** Oh, I never knew this before!

No modern label likes to receive tracks attached to emails. They often have email filters set on that filter out mails with attachments, or will simply skip the email altogether.

Just don't do it.

The preferred method is the combination of a streaming and download link hosted on familiar places. SoundCloud private links or Google Drive links work best here. For Google Drive, make sure if you send over a Google Drive link make sure your track is organized in the right folder before grabbing its share link.

Be sure to change the permissions to make sure that 'anybody with the link can view.' You want to make this as painless as possible for the other party – especially if you're going with a cold email.

For private SoundCloud uploads, make sure all track tags are set correctly and that your email address is in the description. You can grab a shortened 'sharing link' from the upload.