

**Berklee
Online**



Music Business

Digital Handbook

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Welcome!

Whether you're just beginning your musical journey, advancing your career, or simply seeking a community that shares your passion, you belong at Berklee Online. I encourage you to explore this handbook, and learn how we can help you confidently develop your craft and build your musical future.

All the best,

A stylized, handwritten signature in white ink, appearing to read 'Jonathan Mahoney'.

Jonathan Mahoney

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Merch That Moves Fans and Grows Your Brand

By Chris Wares

From the Online Course
Music Marketing 101

Merchandise, often referred to as “merch,” is a crucial aspect of a musician’s brand and revenue strategy. It encompasses a wide array of branded products that fans can purchase to show their support and affiliation with an artist. While traditional merch items like T-shirts and hoodies are time-tested staples, today’s merch offerings also include physical music formats such as vinyl records, CDs, and even cassettes. These formats are often considered merch because they serve as tangible, collectible items that fans cherish. (How many people do you know that own a cassette player, or even CD player, for that matter?) Effective merch strategies not only provide an additional revenue stream but also deepen fan engagement and loyalty.

Let’s explore the steps to develop and execute a successful merch strategy, from understanding your audience to analyzing sales performance.

Understanding Your Audience

The foundation of any successful merch strategy lies in understanding your audience. Knowing what your fans like and what they are willing to purchase is extremely important.

By gaining a deep understanding of your target market, you can design and offer products that truly resonate with your fanbase, leading to higher sales and stronger brand loyalty.

- **Market research:** Start by conducting thorough market research. Conduct surveys and social media polls, analyze data from past merch sales, and check out what other artists in your genre are offering. Pay attention to trends and preferences within your fanbase. Look for patterns in their behavior and interests. For example, do your fans prefer eco-friendly products? Are they interested in limited edition items? This information will help you tailor your merch offerings to meet their specific needs and desires.

- **Engagement and feedback:** Engage with your fans directly to gather insights. Using social media is an excellent way to interact with your audience. Ask them what type of merch they would love to see next. Create polls or Q&A sessions to get direct feedback. This not only helps in understanding their preferences, but also makes fans feel valued and involved in your creative process.

- **Demographic analysis:** Analyze the demographics of your fanbase. Understand their age, gender, location, and even their

lifestyle choices. Younger audiences might be more inclined towards trendy, inexpensive items, while older fans might appreciate classic, high-quality products. Geographical data can also influence the type of merch you offer. Fans in colder climates might prefer hoodies and beanies, while those in warmer regions might opt for T-shirts and caps.

- **Psychographic profiling:** Go beyond demographics and delve into the psychographics of your audience. This includes their interests, attitudes, values, and lifestyles. For instance, if your fans are passionate about sustainability, consider offering eco-friendly merch. If they are tech-savvy, think about integrating tech elements into your products, such as QR codes that link to exclusive content.

- **Behavioral insights:** Study the purchasing behavior of your fans. When do they buy the most? Is it during album releases, tours, or special events? Do they prefer buying in bundles or single items? Understanding these patterns can help you optimize your merch strategy for different occasions, maximizing sales opportunities.

Integrating the Marketing Mix (4 Ps)

While developing a merch strategy, integrating the marketing mix, also known as “the 4 Ps” (product, price, place, and promotion) can be a really useful tool. Each element can help create a cohesive and effective merch strategy.

Product

Here are some considerations when selecting the types of merch items you will sell and their design:

- **Creating designs:** The design of your merch should reflect your brand identity, be visually appealing, and resonate with your audience. Collaborate with artists or graphic designers, or use tools like Canva to create your designs. Platforms like 99designs, Fiverr, and Upwork connect you with freelance designers for custom projects, while communities like Behance and Dribbble showcase portfolios to help you discover creative professionals whose style matches your vision.

● **Types of merchandise:** Offer a variety of products to cater to different fan preferences. Common merchandise items include apparel (T-shirts, hoodies, hats), accessories (pins, patches, phone cases), music-related items (vinyl records, CDs, posters), and lifestyle products (mugs, water bottles, tote bags). To take this a step further, deeply understand the interests and passions of your fans and create specialized merchandise that aligns with them. This could include items and accessories related to interests such as video games, skateboarding, jewelry, and beyond.

● **Legal considerations:** It's important to ensure that all designs are original or properly licensed. Protect your brand by trademarking your logo and key designs. This prevents unauthorized use and ensures that your merch stands out in the market.

Merch Item Ideas

- T-shirts
- hoodies/sweatshirts
- tank tops
- crop tops
- beanies
- baseball caps

continued on next page

- trucker hats
- bandanas
- scarves
- towels
- pins and buttons
- patches
- phone cases
- tote bags
- drawstring bags
- messenger bags
- guitar picks
- USB/flash drives with exclusive content
- posters (framed & unframed)
- signed photos
- handwritten lyrics
- journals (notebooks)
- stickers
- jewelry (bracelets, necklaces)
- pens
- socks
- underwear
- sunglasses
- water bottles
- coffee mugs
- beer koozies
- bottle openers
- cannabis accessories
- lighters
- matches
- glowsticks
- makeup
- perfume
- candles
- shot glasses
- art or crafts made by the artist

Price

Determining the price of the merch items you plan on selling.

- **Setting goals:** Define clear objectives for your merch. Are you looking to boost revenue, promote a new album, or enhance fan engagement? Set measurable targets such as the number of items sold or revenue generated within a specific period.
- **Cost analysis:** Calculate the total cost per item, including production, shipping, and marketing expenses. Your pricing should cover these costs and provide a reasonable profit margin.
- **Pricing strategies:** Consider different pricing strategies such as:
 - **Cost-plus pricing:** Mark up your price to ensure a profit.
 - **Competitive pricing:** Price based on what similar artists are charging, ensuring your prices are attractive to fans.
 - **Perceived-value pricing:** Factor in how your audience values exclusivity, design, or limited editions. Sometimes fans are willing to pay more for “special” items.
 - **Bundle pricing:** Offer discounts on bundles—like a T-shirt and CD combo—to increase average order value and strengthen your brand connection.

Place

Figuring out where and how to sell your merch items to maximize sales and revenues.

- **Online sales:** Set up an online store on your website or direct-to-fan page using platforms like Shopify, Bandcamp, or Big Cartel. Ensure a seamless user experience with easy navigation, secure payment options, and responsive customer service.
- **In-person sales:** Create an appealing merch booth experience for live shows. Display items attractively and ensure you have enough inventory. Train staff or volunteers to manage sales efficiently and provide excellent customer service.
- **Choosing merchandise suppliers:** Select reliable suppliers for print-on-demand services and bulk manufacturing. Evaluate them based on reviews, product quality, and reliability. Request samples to ensure quality meets your standards before making a large order.
- **Managing inventory and fulfillment:** Evaluate options for managing inventory and fulfillment, from doing it yourself to working with a print-on-demand (POD) service.

Promotion

Promoting merch items through various communication channels.

- **Brand integration:** Your merch promotion should be an integral part of your overall marketing strategy. Use consistent branding across all platforms to ensure that your merch feels like a natural extension of your music and brand.

- **Promotion channels:**

- **Social media:** Leverage platforms like TikTok, Instagram, X, and Facebook to showcase your merch. Use engaging content like behind-the-scenes looks, fan photos, and exclusive offers.
- **Influencers and fan-generated content:** Collaborate with influencers and fans to feature your merch on their socials.
- **Email marketing:** Send targeted email campaigns to your fanbase. Highlight new products, special offers, and limited-time deals.
- **Online store:** Offer sales promotions and feature selected merch items on your website or online store prominently.
- **Live shows:** Set up an attractive merch booth at concerts and events. Engage with fans directly and offer exclusive items available only at live shows.

- **Urgency and scarcity:** Drive sales by creating a sense of urgency and scarcity. Offer limited edition items or time-sensitive deals. Pre-order campaigns can also generate excitement and fund production costs upfront.

Merch isn't just about selling things: it's about building a deeper relationship with your audience. When your products reflect who you are and what your fans love, they become more than just revenue; they become part of your story.

Chris Wares wrote the Berklee Online course from which this lesson comes. Learn how one class rewrote his career (and how he later rewrote that class) on the following pages, or explore more lessons from this course at the link below.

Interested in exploring this course further?

Learn More



Instructor Spotlight:

Chris Wares

Chris Wares is the assistant chair of the Music Business/Management department at Berklee College of Music. He has worked in artist management, marketing, copyright administration, and distribution, leading campaigns for Grammy and Juno winners and securing significant funding for artists and companies.

A passionate advocate for emerging talent, Chris also mentors young creators through grant programs and industry nonprofits.

With Berklee Online, he wrote and teaches *Music Marketing 101*.

When did you first know you wanted to make music a part of what you do?

When I was three, I told my dad I got “funny feelings in my bones” whenever I heard music. That feeling’s never gone away.

You started in sound engineering but later moved into the business side of music. What steps did you take to prepare for that transition?

I wanted to upskill, so I took a class at Berklee Online, not knowing that, over 10 years later and with all the changes happening in the industry, I would be completely revising that course.

How do you think about artist development and marketing?

I tend to take a very holistic approach in marketing, especially because I don’t necessarily see it as just marketing. I also see it as artist development. I don’t see them as two separate things. So when I’m first working with an artist, it’s “yeah, I can teach you how to get your music on playlists,” and “I can teach you how to pitch, or get an interview on a blog or a podcast.” But really, before we even get to those tactics, I want to get into “What is your brand identity?”; “What is your unique voice?”; “What makes you different from other artists?”

What Makes a Good Artist Manager?

By Ardie Farhadieh

From the Online Course
Artist Management

When an artist and artist manager decide to work together, their relationship becomes about more than just business. The artist manager will practically become family to the artist, a trusted friend, an executive coach, and CEO of the artist's business. Once working together, the manager and artist will be in constant communication with one another in regard to the ins and outs of the artist's career. It takes a certain kind of person to be a good artist manager, and here are some of the qualities you will need:

Passion

Without passion and love for the music you are representing, it's impossible for you to be an effective artist manager. When an artist manager discovers an artist, they need to believe in their music and visualize the path to a successful career. It's passion that will allow the manager to work alongside the artist, regardless of the ups and downs that come with their career. If either the artist or artist manager loses that passion, then it's harder to drum up passion in the people the artist is playing for. Ultimately, if the manager still has passion, they will be able to overcome the tougher obstacles that come with managing an artist.

“I discovered the Replacements in the mid-’80s and lost my mind. That was it for me. Three-chord guitar rock became my jam. I just wanted to see every live show I could.”

Janet Billig Rich saw the Replacements more than 100 times before she even entered the music business. Her entire career—selling merch, interning, signing Hole, managing Nirvana, the Breeders, the Lemonheads, and more—sprang from chasing that raw musical high. Be sure to listen to the interview with her on Berklee Online’s Music Is My Life podcast, where this quote comes from.

Drive

With passion for the artist’s music comes the drive to manage and work hard on their behalf. Passion and drive will go hand-in-hand. There will be a level of excitement that comes from managing an artist and seeing their growth from effective strategy. Every little win will seem big because it will be the passion and drive that will have made that win possible. This excitement should hopefully

create a level of drive and propel a manager to work even harder every step of the way.

“I’m a student of trying new things. Think about Prince or Radiohead—people thought they were crazy. Taking chances doesn’t come without risk, and I don’t want to be fearful.”

Guy Oseary wanted to work with Madonna so badly that when he first appealed to her manager for a job, he offered to do it for free. He eventually went on to manage Madonna himself, as well as Red Hot Chili Peppers and U2—whom he famously advised to put their album on the iPhones of every Apple user, a decision he told *Variety* in 2022 was worth the risk.

Leadership

Another quality an artist manager should possess is leadership. Leadership is crucial, as the artist will most likely not understand how to maneuver the nuances of the music industry. An artist might not understand deal structures, the differences between labels, publishers, rights organizations, and what different team members

do, so it'll be the job of the manager to effectively lead the artist in the right direction.

“I try to lead by example. I’m not above any task and I don’t ask a Roc employee to do something I wouldn’t or haven’t done myself. Anyone who has seen me work can attest to that. It starts with commitment and discipline: most people who’ve been with me for a while know my response to a question before they ask it. That steadiness, to me, is the essence of leadership.”

Desiree Perez is the CEO of Roc Nation, which she co-founded with Jay-Z. The company represents artists including Rihanna, J. Cole, Lil Uzi Vert, Megan Thee Stallion, and Buju Banton.

Transparency

The artist should feel comfortable and trust the manager to guide the artist’s career in a manner that sets the artist up for success. The more transparent a manager is, the more trust they build with the

artist. It's this trust that will ultimately create a long-lasting bond between an artist and their manager.

“I think it's important to offer a creative opinion, even if the artists disagree with most of it—and, trust me, the good ones usually do—and remember that being overly reliant on people at labels is dangerous.”

Jonathan Dickins *has been Adele's manager since 2006, and Adele has confirmed Dickins's account to Vanity Fair: “My manager and I butt heads all the time, we raise our voices, but if he says, I don't think you should do something, I'm like, ‘fine, I won't do it.’”*

Knowledge

Knowledge is power, and a great manager should understand every aspect of the music industry and how it functions. In order to properly guide an artist's career successfully, you must have a strong knowledge of how the music industry works and an understanding of the strategies that build an artist's brand and retain fans.

In the early days of a manager's career, it will be virtually impossible to fully understand how the industry functions—and that's why experience is a key factor in making a good manager—but by actively working on the job and encountering the various players, a manager will start to gain a knowledge base. Additionally, a manager should be able to take the knowledge they've gained and educate the artist every step of the way while laying a foundation of trust and transparency.

“I don't expect an artist to come to me and have their shit organized—that's what I'm here for. I expect an artist to come to me with a vision, and to want to do this for the right reasons.”

Wassim “Sal” Slaiby manages a diverse roster of artists through his company, SALXCO, and also co-founded XO Records with The Weeknd. Some of his notable clients include The Weeknd, Doja Cat, French Montana, Bebe Rexha, Ty Dolla \$ign, Metro Boomin, and Swedish House Mafia. The above quote comes from an interview with Music Business Worldwide.

Compassion

An artist will seek career guidance from a manager, but over time, an artist will start to confide with a manager about relationships, mental health, and many other matters. A good manager will be able to chat with the artist and guide them through the high points and low points of their personal life and professional career. Good managers will offer reassurance, provide constructive criticism, and show the artist how all the hard work that they put forth will eventually pay off.

“My mantra since day one has been: Do what’s right for the artists and, in turn, that decision will be right for you. I can honestly say that strategy hasn’t failed me once.”

Irving Azoff has built a decades-long career managing artists ranging from the Eagles to Christina Aguilera and Cardi B. Known for fierce loyalty to his clients, he’s been called “the most powerful man in music” for his ability to champion artists’ rights and protect their interests—often at the expense of his own relationships with labels and promoters. The above quote comes from an interview with Music Business Worldwide.

Boundaries

There will be times that the artist's personal problems or career is affecting their mental health to the point where whatever the manager says will not matter. Just like any friendship, a good manager should be able to recognize when their advice isn't enough to help the artist. At some point, it's okay for a manager to acknowledge this and then properly guide, or refer, the artist to the appropriate persons that can help, such as a professionally trained therapist or specialist.

“I want them to have complete control over their creative input and allow me to do what I do best, which is run the business and sell whatever is created. If I have to be involved in the creative, I'm not as effective with the business.”

Anthony Saleh is the CEO of Emagen Entertainment Group, which reps such notable acts as Kendrick Lamar and Nas. He previously worked with Future. The above quote comes from an interview with Forbes.

While friendships naturally occur in business, a manager should also know when to set boundaries. As another example, a manager should not be expected to be accessible 24/7 to an artist. Managers should make a conscious effort to not be reachable at certain hours, so they can rest, recharge, and take personal time for themselves.

Overall, there are various qualities a manager should possess. An artist manager must be able to multitask, work hard under pressure, keep calm in stressful situations, and have strong organizational skills. Truth be told, the ability to go above and beyond for the artist is what makes a successful artist manager.

Ardie Farhadieh is the author of the Berklee Online course from which this lesson comes. Check out the following pages to read how he went from a violinist to an artist manager, or explore more lessons from this course at the link below.

Interested in exploring this course further?

[Learn More](#)



Instructor Spotlight:

Ardie Farhadieh

Ardie Farhadieh began his music career managing artists at the Windish Agency, then led marketing at the Billions Corporation, working with acts like Mumford & Sons, Bon Iver, and St. Vincent. He co-created Spotify's Fans First presale program and later launched Wick Management, helping Marian Hill reach platinum success. Named to *Billboard's* 40 Under 40, Ardie now champions artists at Split Second Management.

With Berklee Online, he wrote and teaches *Artist Management*.

Tell us about your musical background.

I've been playing violin since I was three and I sort of have a split personality when it comes to music. I have a love of classical music, but I also have a love for a lot of mainstream, contemporary music. I grew up listening to my dad's extensive classical music vinyl collection, and it really impacted me. Furthermore, I grew up in Chicago, which has vibrant house music and punk rock scenes.

What attracted you to the business side of the industry?

Managers get to work in every part of the industry and work closely in developing and building the artist's career. It's as hands-on as you can get. I wanted to be able to make a difference in the world and found ways in which I could do that through music.

If you could offer one piece of advice to a musician trying to become more business savvy, what would it be?

Today, it's not just about making the best music. It's also about building an authentic brand that is true to oneself. Artists also need to keep up with technology, learn how to market themselves, be their own label, publisher, etc. I say try not to be overwhelmed by this, and instead, adapt in a way that will allow you to build something meaningful and authentic that allows you to feel fulfilled.



Instructor Spotlight:

Tonya Butler

An educator, attorney, administrator, and motivational speaker, Tonya Butler is chair of the Music Business/Management department at Berklee College of Music. She spent 14 years as an entertainment attorney, working in-house for record and publishing companies and film studios. Her clients included Rhino Records, MGM Music, and Global Disc Records.

At Berklee Online, Tonya authored the graduate course *Music Business Management and Leadership*.

Who is someone in the music industry who you admire for making the most of their brand, from a business perspective?

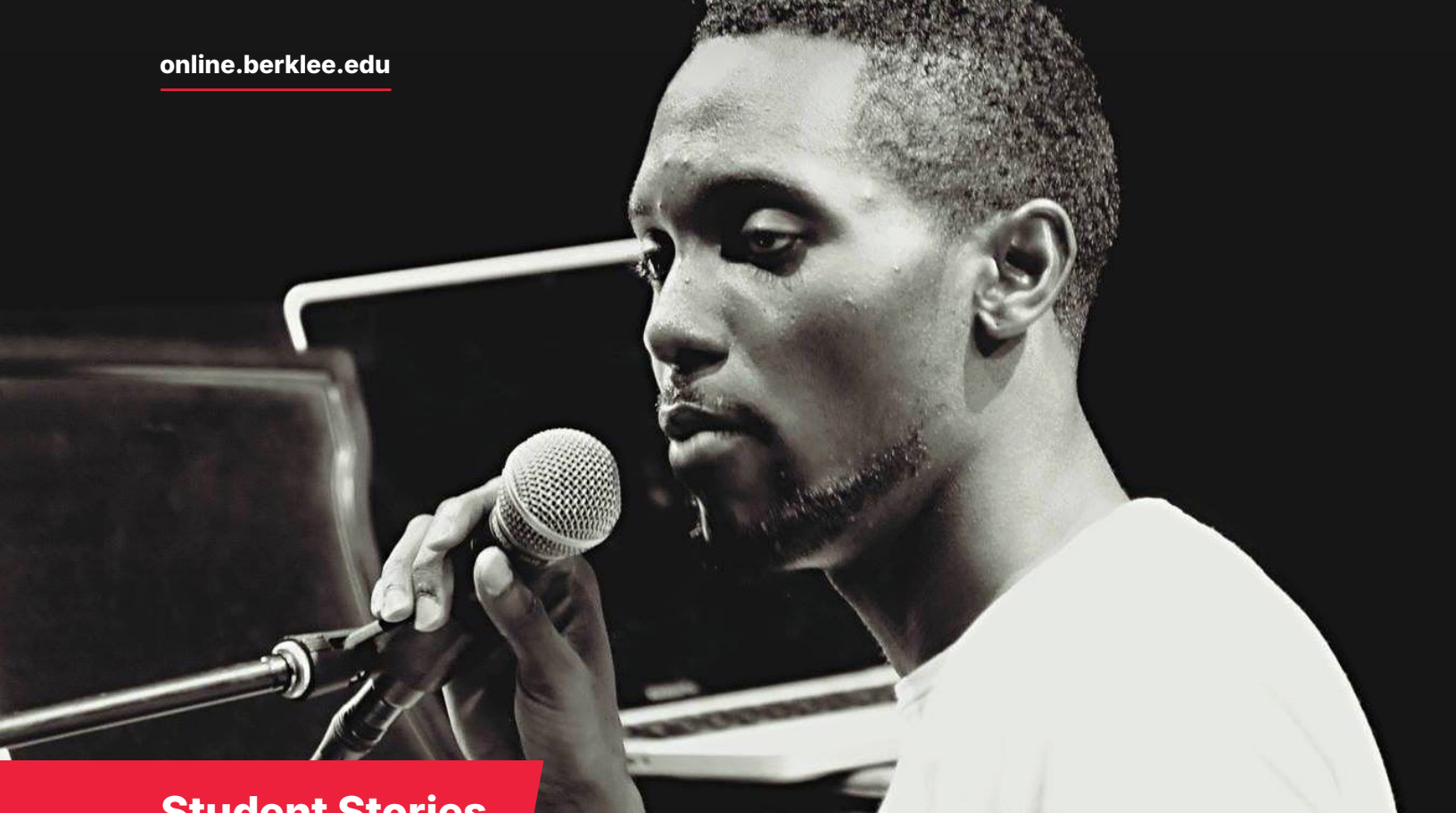
I have a lot of respect and admiration for Lady Gaga. Her move into acting and fashion was brilliant.

What is the biggest lesson you learned the hard way in the music business?

The importance of reputation and integrity. The music business is actually a very small world. Although what you know and who you know are crucial, WHO KNOWS YOU and what they know about you is what will form the basis of your relationships in the industry moving forward.

If you could offer one piece of advice to a musician who is trying to become more business savvy, what would you say?

Educate yourself on what it takes to protect yourself and your music. The ability to make music is a gift, but the ability to make a living with your music is a skill.



Student Stories

Fighting for Family with Music Business

By Talia Smith-Muller

Jamelle Houston was three years old when he sat at his grandparents' piano at their home in Temple, Texas and struck a chord for the first time. In that moment, his family knew that he had a gift that runs in the family. His grandfather, John Wilson, was

a drummer in the 1960s Texas funk band, the Brothers Seven. He inspired Jamelle to become a musician, and is also the reason why he wants to pursue music law.

“It goes back to my grandfather and his group,” he says. “They have a song called ‘Takin’ Care of Business’ and we’ve always wondered ... I’m not saying nothing, but if you go and you listen to, ‘Takin’ Care of Business’ by Minnie Nelson and the Brothers Seven, and then you go and you listen to Bachman-Turner Overdrive. I just wonder sometimes, I’m going to leave it at that.”

Jamelle began the music business master’s program with Berklee Online to empower himself and others to protect their music and art. One day, he would like to create a documentary about the Brothers Seven and shine a light on his grandfather’s legacy, and the possible copyright infringement case.

“That really sparked something in me,” he says. “There are so many stories of that out there. And I just want to make sure that people have the knowledge and know this is what they should be doing as it relates to intellectual property.”

Jamelle has established his music career in LA and toured the world with various musical acts, but his roots are strong in his hometown of Temple, Texas, and he's very much invested in improving the town for the better. It's a place where he and his grandfather's musical endeavors began, a place he returns to each summer to give back through his nonprofit music camp, and a place that is currently grappling with racial injustice during the Black Lives Matter movement.

Jamelle moved to LA in 2011 to attend the Independent Artist Program at Musicians Institute, and attributes part of his success to the relationships that he's built with musicians in his community. As a session pianist and keyboardist, he went on to tour with acts such as Conrad Sewell and AJ Mitchell, performing on the *Tonight Show with Jimmy Fallon* and the *Today Show*. He realized that Temple was lacking musical community and opportunities, so he took it upon himself to foster music and art in a town that truly needed it.

"In my hometown, there are just no opportunities for those young creatives," he says. "You have baseball camps, soccer camp, every other camp, but you've got all these creatives that are just dying to get around other creatives. And I was just like, 'I guess it's up to me.'"

In 2015, Jamelle established his nonprofit, the Academy of Art Music Performance and Dance (AAMP'D), where students can learn everything from songwriting to hip-hop, dance, theater, voice, photography, and more. Every summer, he goes back to Temple with his friends from LA to run the camp and teach the various courses.



In my hometown, you've got all these creatives that are just dying to get around other creatives. And I was just like, "I guess it's up to me."

- Jamelle Houston

Among the AAMP'D teachers are Jacob Lusk, a former *American Idol* contestant who now teaches voice; Justin Arrington, an artist who teaches contemporary dance; and Patrick Gamble (PatG), who teaches hip-hop. The camp caps at 100 students and Jamelle says that these students are quite literally amped up to get started every summer.

“When I tell you, they come ready, they’re like, ‘Hey Jamelle, you know, I sat at home last night, and I was thinking, on the chorus,’ I’m just like, ‘Okay! Let’s work,’” he says.

Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, Jamelle paused the 2020 program with plans to come back in 2021. He didn’t travel to Temple this summer for the first time in years, but his hometown has been on his mind, especially during the Black Lives Matter movement.

In December 2019, Jamelle’s friend Michael Dean was fatally shot in the head by former Temple police officer Carmen DeCruz after he was pulled over for a traffic stop. This summer, Dean’s family visited the White House with other parents of Black men who have been killed at the hands of police brutality. Jamelle says that what upsets him the most is that justice has not been served, which underscores the importance of the current movement.

“It’s been really hard because it just feels like the biggest coverup I’ve ever seen in my life, and Temple is a small community,” he says. “They’ve admitted, ‘We’ve never had anything like this happen. We don’t really know what to do, or how to do it,’ and I’m like, just do what’s right. That’s all we’re asking, that’s it.”

He says that this hit him personally, not only because Dean was his friend, but because Jamelle is a Black man in America himself.

“I have that story of being racially profiled and pulled over,” he says. “Put in handcuffs, just because you know, you fit the description. And I’m asking them, ‘Well, why was I pulled over?’ It hits close to home and people don’t realize it. That’s why I’m glad that there’s an awakening of what’s really going on. You really do, as a person of color, have to move about differently. It just is what it is.”

Although there is more progress to be made, Jamelle says it’s been amazing to see the support from around the world. As he begins his music business master’s program this fall, Jamelle is going to use his education to create more good in Temple and beyond, whether he’s fighting for his grandfather’s copyrights, providing children music education, or fighting for racial justice.

“I believe that we all have some level of influence and purpose as it relates to our gifts,” he says. “I would hope that my musical gifts and contribution to the world would influence and inspire other creatives to realize that there’s a world out there waiting on the gifts that you have to offer!”



Instructor Spotlight:

E. Michael Harrington

Dr. E. Michael Harrington is a professor of music copyright and intellectual property matters. He has worked as a consultant and expert witness in hundreds of copyright matters and has worked with Steven Spielberg, Tupac Shakur, Lady Gaga, and many others.

At Berklee Online, he authored *Music Business Law* and instructs *Music Licensing* and the *Music Business Capstone*.

Is understanding music essential to succeed in the business?

My understanding of music, especially as a music theorist, composer, and ethnomusicologist, has been central to my entrance into and continuance in the music and entertainment business.

If you were starting out now and you had to choose one area of the music business to start learning about, which area would you start with?

Copyright law, as this is the most important and only federal means by which music is respected and protected.

What's the biggest lesson you learned in the music business?

Get legal advice as needed. The “ask for forgiveness later” thought is wonderful EXCEPT in legal situations.

What advice do you give musicians who are trying to become more business savvy?

Surprise yourself—if you hate country music, study it. If you hate hip-hop, study it. If you hate classical music, study it.

Grant Writing: Turning Ideas Into Funded Projects

By Roya Hu

From the Four-Week Online Course

Grant Writing: Funding Your Creative and Teaching Projects

Individuals and organizations raise money for a wide variety of purposes. Whether you're an educator, artist, entrepreneur, or scholar looking to fund an independent, creative, or research project, grants can be powerful tools for solving problems.

For educators, grants can support classroom innovation, professional development, curriculum enhancements, or research projects—whether it's funding for new technology, anti-bullying programs, field trips, or arts integration in schools. Artists can use grants to finance creative projects, residencies, or the production of new work, allowing them to focus on their craft without financial strain. From recording, mixing, and mastering an album to producing a documentary or launching a community theater program, grants provide artists with resources to bring their visions to life. Entrepreneurs, especially those in social enterprises or creative industries, can secure grants to develop prototypes, purchase specialized equipment or software, scale sustainable businesses, or fund research and development for innovative solutions.

Grant funding can open doors that might otherwise stay closed. Here are some tips to help you get started with the grant-funding process.

What Is a Grant?

In short, grants are non-repayable funds awarded for a specific purpose. Unlike loans—which must be repaid, often with interest, over a set period—grants are essentially free money awarded for a specific purpose. However, grants require a detailed proposal outlining the project, expected impact, and budget, among other things, and are typically awarded based on merit, need, or alignment with a funder’s mission. They are most often disbursed by governments, foundations, corporations, or individuals. The federal government and state and local governments give grants (often in the form of contracts) that generally require paperwork, audits, and accountability. Private foundations and corporations give grants. Individuals give grants, usually through a fund or a trust set up for that purpose and administered by a bank or foundation.

At its essence, a grant is an exchange. It’s a partnership that is mutually beneficial between the funder or grantor (one giving funds) and the grantee (one receiving the funds). Both parties get something out of the deal. While the grantee receives funds to pursue a project, the grantor’s agenda, mission, or goodwill is promoted through that exchange.

To be successful in grant writing or fundraising, you must effectively articulate your vision and the impact of your work in a way that compels the reader or funder to invest in your project. The goal is to present it as a mutually beneficial exchange—one that aligns with the funder's values and mission while advancing your work in meaningful ways. Funders are essentially investing in work they cannot accomplish on their own, supporting initiatives that complement their goals.

Why Do You Need Funding?

Writing a successful grant proposal is more than just filling out an application or completing some forms—it's about telling a compelling story that aligns your needs with the priorities of potential funders. Understanding the purpose behind your funding request and the impact it will have is the foundation of a strong proposal. Before you begin the grant writing process, it's essential to take a step back and evaluate who you are, what you want to do, why you need funding, the amount of funding required, and which funders align best with your goals.

Key Questions to Ask Before You Apply

As we begin the process of grant writing, it's important to take a moment to reflect on some questions before you decide to invest the time and energy it takes to find the right funder and write your grant proposal. For example:

- Are you applying as an individual for a personal project that needs funding or on behalf of an organization (whether it's a school district, a nonprofit, or your business)?
- Are you looking for seed money to pilot a new program or initiative? Or, do you need sustaining funds to maintain or continue an existing program?
- Are you looking for funds to cover operational expenses related to a project, like covering stipends, supplies, training, or travel? Or, are you looking for funds to cover capital expenses, such as the acquisition, construction, renovation, or improvement of physical assets such as buildings, equipment, and infrastructure?

Every time an individual (or an organization) identifies a need or gap in services that isn't covered by a budget, that person should be thinking about programs and grants to address the problem. Whether your funding needs may range from a few hundred or thousands to many millions of dollars, it's important to find the right funder whose goals align with your project's goals to help you solve the problem at hand.

Primary Benefits of Grants

The benefits of grants can be slotted into a few main categories:

- **Growth opportunities:** With the right grant, you or your organization can pilot new programs, expand existing ones, or enter new areas of service. This ability to grow and adapt is essential in a world where your needs or the needs of the communities you serve are constantly evolving.
- **Credibility and trust:** Securing a grant, particularly from a well-known funder, can significantly enhance your credibility, as well as that of your organization. It signals to other potential funders that you are trustworthy, capable, and aligned with larger goals.

- **Diversification of income:** Grants allow individuals and organizations to diversify their income streams, reducing dependence on any single source of revenue.

While grant funding stands out as a powerful option, it often comes with specific conditions, reporting requirements, and a clear expectation of impact. This means that, **while grants can be a lifeline, they also require accountability, transparency, and strategic planning.** It's imperative to deliver on the promises you made in your grant proposal. In essence, when you receive a grant, you're entering into a partnership or exchange with the funder; one that's built on mutual trust and a shared vision for change.

Reframe How You Think About Asking for Funding

Asking for money can be intimidating at first, and many of us have cultural hang-ups about it—or even discussing finances at all. The ability to ask for funding—whether for yourself or on behalf of an organization—is a skill that can be learned and improved upon over time. Just like children have no hesitation in asking for what they want, those seeking grant funding should approach the process with

confidence and persistence. If a child is denied money, they often try again, rephrase their request (“I’ll only use it for books”), or offer an alternative (“What if I clean my room first?”). This natural resilience is something we can apply when seeking financial support for meaningful projects, remembering that a “no” often simply means “not yet.” Persistence, preparation, and belief in your project’s value can gradually shift that response to a “yes.”

Our beliefs about money, including the discomfort around asking for it, are learned behaviors. In many cultures, discussing finances openly is common, yet many of us have been conditioned to view money as a private matter, making it difficult to request funding, even for important causes. However, securing grant funding is not just about personal gain—as we’ve already established (and will continue to emphasize), **it’s about advocating for a project that creates impact and aligns with the funder’s mission.** Being transparent and confident about your goals helps funders see you as a partner, not a petitioner.

Just as we evolve in our thinking about social issues, health, and education, we must also reassess our attitudes toward money and funding. Applying for grants requires us to shift from seeing money

as something to avoid discussing to recognizing it as a tool that enables progress and innovation. By adopting a mindset that values strategic funding as a means to support important work, we can confidently and effectively advocate for the resources needed to bring our projects to life. It's good to remember that **grants are not a handout, but rather a hand-up**. It's a mutually beneficial exchange that fuels creativity, sustainability, and lasting community impact.

Roya Hu is the author of the Berklee Online course from which this lesson comes. See how she helps artists balance art and entrepreneurship on the next page, or learn more about the other lessons in this course by clicking the link below.

Interested in exploring this course further?

Learn More



Instructor Spotlight:

Roya Hu

Roya Hu is the Associate Dean for Faculty Development at Berklee, where she manages faculty grants, supports sponsored research and creative scholarship, and leads high-profile community-building and professional development events. Additionally, she serves as a Fulbright Program Advisor for the US Student Program.

With Berklee Online, she teaches *Culminating Experience in Music Business 2* and *Grant Writing: Funding Your Creative and Teaching Projects*, the latter of which she also authored.

What attracted you to the business side of the industry?

The opportunity to build a sustainable framework around creative energy. Business, at its core, is about exchange and reciprocity for me—a collaborative process that can't be accomplished alone. With a background in economics, I became fascinated by how systematic business thinking could be applied to solve a central challenge in the arts: how to consistently support and fund artistic endeavors. It's about leveraging smart strategy to turn a brilliant, abstract creative vision into a successful, tangible venture.

If you could offer advice to a musician who is trying to become more business savvy, what would you say?

To build a sustainable music career, you must treat your artistry like an enterprise. Take time to articulate and write out your mission (who you are now), your vision (where you want to be in the next few years), and your strategic direction (the path to get from your mission to your vision). A crucial element of this strategic planning is understanding that success is not merely defined by the opportunities you accept, but by the gigs, collaborations, and projects you intentionally decline. Saying “no” preserves your most valuable resources—time, energy, and creative integrity—allowing you to invest more deeply in the paths that align with your goals.



Tips of the Trade

How to Turn Your Band into a Business

By Leah Waldo

Thinking about your band or music as a business venture may make you feel a bit uneasy, but if you're an independent artist, thinking this way can put you on the path towards a sustainable music career and enable you to do more of what you love: Creating music!

In my new free massive open online course on Coursera, *Navigate the Music Business as an Independent Artist*, I share five tips for turning your band into a business. Read on for an overview and learn how to make the most out of your music.

Please note: *The information shared here refers to the United States only, and is meant as a supplement to professional legal advice. Check your local laws and tax code for information that is specific to your area, and consider seeking professional consultation from a legal expert.*

1. Incorporate as an LLC

An LLC, or limited liability company, is a corporate structure where the members of the company cannot be held personally liable for the company's debts and liabilities. Let's say you and your band get into some legal trouble—for example, a venue is suing you for allegedly damaging some of their equipment. And let's say you lost the court case and owe that venue money. If you have not incorporated as an LLC, you can be held personally liable—meaning, the venue can go after your personal assets such as a car, house, or any personal savings accounts. If you have incorporated as an LLC, then that venue can only go after any assets owned by

that LLC (which probably isn't much if you're just starting out). Incorporating as an LLC is essential for legally protecting yourself and your bandmates.

A note to songwriters: You may not need an LLC, but you should absolutely register a publishing company. Why? As John Kellogg says, "Every time music gets played, somebody gets paid." You want to ensure that somebody is you.

As a songwriter, when you register with a performing rights company (BMI, ASCAP, or SESAC), you're entitled to the writer's share of the royalty for a song, which is 50 percent. That other 50 percent goes to the publisher. If you are an indie songwriter and are not affiliated with any publisher, you're essentially leaving that other 50 percent on the table. If you incorporate as your own publishing company and then register your songs as the publisher with the performing rights company, then you'll receive the full 100 percent of the royalties owed.

Registering a publishing company is really easy. Simply go to your local City Clerk's office and request to fill out a Business Registration form. Complete the form, pay a small fee (usually

no more than \$80), and voila! You're officially the founder and president of a new publishing company. Finally, you'll need to register your new publishing company with your performance rights organization (PRO) and list your publishing company as the publisher for your songs.

Last but not least, there is one other major benefit to incorporating: You can open a corporate bank account. Having a corporate bank account that manages all of your band expenses will make managing your money and filing taxes much clearer—that way, you're not intermingling your personal and professional expenses.

2. Bandmates: Employees or Contractors?

Either way, you should absolutely have your bandmates fill out the appropriate tax forms. Why? Well, let's say your band makes \$10,000 in one year. You, being the generous and benevolent bandleader that you are, decide to pay your bandmates \$8,000 of that total \$10,000. When it's time to do your taxes, you are required to report that \$10,000 as income. However, you can also report your expenses,

including salary (for employees) or contractor fees (for independent contractors). These expenses are deducted from the total amount of money you owe taxes on. So, since you paid your bandmates \$8,000, you'll only owe taxes on \$2,000 (because $\$10,000 - \$8,000 = \$2,000$). Again, make sure you have your bandmates complete the appropriate tax forms. You'll need these so that the IRS can confirm that you're not lying about your expenses.

So, what are these forms? You'll need different forms depending on whether your bandmates are employees or independent contractors. An employee fills out a W4 and an independent contractor fills out a W9. The main difference between the two is that employees have taxes withheld from their paychecks (federal, state, local, etc.) whereas independent contractors do not and are required to pay their own taxes. Be aware that if you do not manage your taxes properly, or if you categorize your bandmates incorrectly, you may be audited and charged fees by the IRS.

To learn more about this process and decide which forms to give your bandmates, visit the IRS's website at **www.irs.gov**.

3. Keep Track of Your Income

When you're gigging and touring and money is flying all over the place, it can become difficult to keep track of how much you're bringing in. It's important to keep track of your income because, again, at the end of the year, it'll be time to do those taxes.

If you overreport how much money you brought in, you'll be paying too much in taxes, which is not fun for anyone. But, on the flip side, if you underreport how much money you're bringing in, you won't be paying enough in taxes and could incur fees later. You could get into some serious trouble with the IRS, even if it is an honest mistake. Here are some ways you can keep track of your income:

- Keep an income journal. Every time you get paid, create an entry.
- Keep an online ledger that is saved in the cloud so you can access it from anywhere.
- Download a money management app to help you keep track of income.

4. Keep Track of Your Expenses

We talked about subtracting the amount you pay to your bandmates from your total income. You can do the same with business-related expenses, such as sound equipment, recording software, gas to and from gigs, even guitar strings. These expenses are called “write offs.” As a business, you’re able to “write off” these expenses from your yearly income, thus lowering the amount you’ll owe taxes on. There is one small catch: To “write off” an expense, you’ll need to keep your receipt. Here are some helpful tips:

- Designate a special slot in your wallet just for business-related receipts and empty them into a safe file at home. File them regularly because the ink will fade if kept in a wallet for too long!
- If you’re *really* organized, keep a ledger of your expenses and update it weekly (a little time now saves *a lot* of time later).
- When paying your bandmates, use an app like Venmo to help you easily keep track of how much you’ve paid them.

5. Meet with a Certified Public Accountant (CPA)

Although I've listed this as Tip No. 5, it really should be at the top of the list. If you're ever confused about your finances or taxes, don't just wing it and hope for the best. Take the time to meet with a CPA. They will be able to answer all of your questions and also share additional tips and tricks to help you manage your finances effectively. They're experts when it comes to the tax code and will be able to help you file your taxes correctly. And should the need arise, they'll also be able to help you through an audit from the IRS.

If you'd like to learn more about navigating the music industry as an independent artist, including how to manage a band, planning and recording a record, and launching and running a successful crowdfunding campaign, check out *Building Your Career in Music: Developing a Brand and Funding Your Music*, my free four-week Berklee Online course on Coursera!

Figuring out how to turn your band into a business can sound scary, but it's actually pretty easy. Now more than ever, indie artists

need to be financially literate and these tips will help you on your way. I started with just a guitar and gas money and now I'm able to independently fund my projects solely with the revenue I generate from my music. A few of the accomplishments I'm most proud of being able to finance: recording in Nashville with producers Caleb Gilbreath and Eddie Bayers (with some help from some of the top players in town); hiring a marketing and PR team (who help me craft the "story" of each new release and alert the media about them), and shooting quality music videos and visual content (check out my **Instagram** and **Facebook!**).

Make Your Brand Work for You

By John Kellogg

From the Online Course
Music Business Revenue Streams

An artist's brand represents how the artist is perceived by its audience. Branding is the pursuit of strengthening that perception which can lead to other revenue-generating activities for the artist from other companies or brands that desire to capitalize on the goodwill the artist's brand engenders.

In the 1800s, cattlemen were the first to use the term “branding” when they used hot irons to burn their names or symbols on the hides of their stock to identify which cattle were theirs. As the industrial age matured, companies that mass-produced products also sought to both promote and distinguish their goods from others by affixing a visual mark to their goods. This allowed customers to feel secure in knowing they were purchasing items that were manufactured by reputable companies. In the early 1900s, Columbia was one of first record companies to affix labels with information on the artist as well as their logo on their recordings—a brand that became identifiable with quality recordings. Others like Decca and Okeh also prominently displayed their logos on record labels.

In the 1920s these labels became recognized as the leading companies offering the best in jazz and blues recordings and, as the popularity of records grew in the twentieth century, influential independent labels like Motown and Atlantic grew into large

concerns whose goodwill enabled them to launch sub-labels like Motown's Tamla, Soul, and Gordy, and Atlantic's ATCO and Elektra.

But consumer brands also impacted the music industry. The emergence of television in the early 1950s saw each building their shows like *The Maxwell House Concert*, sponsored by a coffee manufacturer. Companies began promoting their brands by purchasing airtime and creating shows featuring former radio stars who lent their popularity to promoting and/or endorsing the sponsor's products. The format morphed into 30-60-second commercials during network shows and music played a crucial role in the development of the networks thereafter.

Personal branding of performers became an important part of the music industry around the middle of the last century as artists carefully crafted the look and feel of their performances, wardrobe, marketing materials, and logos to enhance their popularity. Variety shows like *Ted Mack's Original Amateur Hour*, an early precursor to series like *American Idol*, featured musical talent like seven-year-old Gladys Knight, who won the competition in 1952. The *Milton Berle Show* and the *Ed Sullivan Show* during the 1950s and 1960s featured musicians on a weekly basis, enabling unknown talent to both make an impression on a national audience and exploit their

personal brands. Sullivan broke musical acts in a way that is hard to comprehend today: 60 million people watched Elvis Presley's first performance on the show in 1956, and 73 million people watched the Beatles' first performance on the show in 1964. Accordingly, music-minded TV shows began popping up: *American Bandstand*, *Upbeat*, *Shindig*, *Hullabaloo*, and *Hollywood A Go-Go*, to name a few.

Though musicians got involved in branding through endorsements from the advent of radio, Michael Jackson took it to a new level as he and his brothers signed a \$5M deal to appear in a Pepsi commercial in 1984. This type of branding partnership paved the way for artists (and brands) to continue to capitalize on popularity.

Since the beginning of the century, musical artists have not only appeared in commercials for products and services, but many have created artist-owned branded products and services. Artists like Jimmy Buffett created his restaurant chain, Margaritaville, and Sammy Hagar launched his own tequila, Cabo Wabo. Brand partnerships between consumer product companies and artists have become the norm, with the likes of Beyoncé, Alicia Keys, and Pharrell Williams assuming new titles and responsibilities with companies as brand ambassadors. Co-branding deals can provide artists with varied primary and ancillary revenues and benefits.

Sponsorship

Music has always been a major component of the advertising mix, with jingles, placement of both popular and unknown music in commercials on radio/TV, and the internet leading the way. Music has the undeniable power to connect and move people's emotions and, since the 1980s, the number of companies partnering with musical artists in advertising or sponsoring live musical events has grown exponentially. The use of the right song or recording in a company's commercial or the placement of advertising sponsoring a music event can create an impression that is unmatched and leads to a relationship-building connection with their consumer.

New artists often expect their labels to provide tour support—money to cover tour expenses that exceed the gross revenue generated from a tour. However, any amounts paid by the label are considered an advance and therefore are recoupable from the artist's royalties. In such an instance, artists may seek additional revenue to offset production costs and/or earn a profit on their tours from lucrative sponsorship deals that assist the artist in both gaining additional exposure and generating non-traditional revenue.

In today's business, where millions of tracks are uploaded every day to sites like SoundCloud, artists must also find new ways to stand out in the cluttered environment and brands often seek artist “partners” to help them create compelling content, increase the brands' relevance, and affect a special connection with their consumers. But gone are the days when brands just want to sponsor a tour. They now desire more involvement in integrated campaigns that traverse tours and include philanthropic endeavors, business, public relations, and social media activities of their artist partners.

Brands that sponsor live music events receive great benefits from that affiliation as an AEG Presents survey indicates:

- 58 percent of attendees of events say they are more likely to trust a brand that is associated with a live music experience
- Eight of 10 millennials feel the most effective way to connect with them is through live music
- 93 percent of millennials prefer brands that sponsor live events
- 43 percent are more likely to make a purchase at a concert

Because of its unique ability to offer a brand the opportunity to develop a special relationship with its customers through multiple channels, Live Nation has experienced double-digit year-over-year growth as high as 20 percent in the high-margin sponsorship sector. Live Nation offers brands the ability to not only connect through signage at venues, but also links through their websites (i.e., Live Nation and Ticketmaster) to gather other vital data on the audiences that attend their events. Its partnership with Cisco to create “smart venues,” with Wi-Fi connectivity at several of its sites, enables Live Nation to interact with concertgoers connected to the company’s app and collect information on ticket and concession purchases, which can help build data for targeting brand messages.

AEG Presents has also entered into wide-ranging, multi-million dollar deals with sponsors that encompass events, concerts, and brand activation at some of its venues and even a lottery ticket sponsorship from a few state lotteries.

Endorsements

When a brand’s logo appears on a sponsored concert advertisement or a product is branded on an artist’s Facebook post of their concert

footage, the brand is merely associating their brand with the artist in a broad, passive way. The artist may not be vouching for the product's reputation for quality. However, a testimonial offered by an artist in the form of an endorsement takes the relationship to another level. In that case, it is incumbent on musicians seeking endorsement deals to align themselves with companies whose brand they use and who have values and ideals similar to their own.

Up and coming musicians (as well as many who are already established) who have acquired a notable following may receive offers from guitar, drum, or microphone manufacturers to endorse their products in exchange for cash payments, reduced priced, or free equipment. This sort of practice has gone on since the beginning of the sale of recorded music, and has involved many of the biggest names in music from every era, as well as many highly-sought-after session and touring musicians.

Some notable examples of artists and their endorsement deals include John Lennon and Rickenbacker guitars, Questlove and Ludwig drums, Joe Bonamassa and Gibson guitars, and Gail Ann Dorsey (David Bowie, Gwen Stefani) and Ampeg bass amps.

In these types of deals, the endorsing musicians may be required to: appear in advertisements; use the gear during performances; appear at clinics featuring the gear; and promote the gear in social media posts, on websites, etc. This type of arrangement works to the advantage of such artists by reducing their costs of purchasing equipment, thereby increasing their net revenue. Superstars are also sought for endorsements for all types of products and, while these deals may be lucrative, they do require an artist to stand behind the brand's product both in public and behind the scenes.

Brand Partnerships

Partnering with brands to raise an artist's profile and/or create awareness of new musical offerings has become a big part of many artists' marketing plans. But that wasn't always the case. In the early 1970s, singer-songwriters in particular, and self-contained bands in general, didn't want to have anything to do with "commercializing" their music by having it used or connected with a commercial brand's products or services.

Bob Dylan, the 1960s anti-establishment/protest music singer/songwriter decried and forbid his music from being used for

commercial marketing in the last century, only to embrace the concept in the new millennium by allowing use of his music in ads for Apple, Victoria's Secret, and even a supermarket chain.

Artists and brands have entered into a new era of mutual respect for how the other may influence the public's perception of their mutual brands. Artists view having their music in used advertising as a means of creating awareness and developing closer relationships with new and old fans, while some companies believe assisting musicians in their pursuit of their art will not only promote their business, but create goodwill with their customers.

John Kellogg is the author of the Berklee Online course from which this lesson comes. Find out who he looks up to in the music business on the next page, or learn more about the other lessons in this course by clicking the link below.

Interested in exploring this course further?

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Instructor Spotlight:

John Kellogg

John P. Kellogg, Esq., is the former Chair of the Music Business/Management department at Berklee College of Music and an entertainment attorney. He has represented Levert, the O'Jays, Eddie Levert, Sr., LSG, Stat Quo of Shady/Aftermath Records, and G-Dep of Bad Boy Records. He also served as general counsel for the late R&B recording star Gerald Levert.

At Berklee Online, John is the director of the Music Business master's program and authored three music business courses.

Is understanding music essential to succeed in the business?

Absolutely! It feeds your desire to conduct business in a way that leads to the betterment of the music industry in general.

Who do you admire for making the most of their brand?

Jay-Z who has been successful in so many categories of business.

If you were starting out now and you had to choose one area of the music business to start learning about, which area would you start with and why?

Copyright. It's the most valuable asset in the music business. Songs are the foundation of the music business. It all starts with a song and currently their value is skyrocketing.

What advice do you give musicians who are trying to become more business savvy?

Read periodicals like the *Wall Street Journal* and *Billboard* to stay abreast of trends and innovative developments in the entertainment business.

World-Class Courses

With Berklee Online, you have more than 300 courses to choose from, including more than 30 music business courses. Here's a look at some selected offerings:

- **Music Business 101** [↗](#)
- **Music Licensing** [↗](#)
- **Music Business Trends and Strategies** [↗](#)
- **Music Business Law for Artists** [↗](#)
- **Music Business Finance for Entrepreneurs** [↗](#)
- **Artist Management in the Music Business** [↗](#)





Instructor Spotlight:

Jamal Dauda

Jamal Dauda is a writer and creative strategist with a long track record of helping brands tell stories that stick. Former positions include Vice President of Content Marketing at *Playboy*, Global Head of Music at WeTransfer and Artist Marketing Manager at Red Bull. He has worked on branded film projects with Björk, Courtney Barnett & Kurt Vile, Fleet Foxes, and more.

At Berklee Online, Jamal authored and instructs the graduate course *Music Marketing: Strategy for Consumer Brands*.

Is understanding music essential to succeed in the business?

I think both sides benefit from understanding the other, as they are inextricably linked and dependent on each other. The way we build businesses and support structures in music should be in service of the needs of musicians.

Who do you admire for making the most of their brand?

Cardi B. I think whenever you can find consistency in message and what connects you to a fanbase, while still growing in your craft, that's a winning combination.

What's the biggest lesson you learned in the music business?

No matter where you sit in the music industry, integrity, innovation, and the drive to keep doing the work are key to continued success.

What advice do you give musicians who are trying to become more business savvy?

Find mentors in every area. You would be amazed what you can learn in a phone call or a coffee hang.

Convergence and the Flood of Media Content

By Jeanine Cowen

From the Online Course
*New Media Economics: Music, Mobile,
Gaming, and Online Markets*

Creative individuals have long partnered with business entities, financial firms, publishers, and distributors at a multitude of stages within the content creation process. It is only in the past few decades that it has become easier for artists to create an independent path through the maze of crafting a fiscally sustainable career. But easier does not always mean better, for every artist. Understanding the ebb and flow of market strategies and alternative finance models is requisite knowledge for creative individuals working in the new media economy.

No longer do the firms producing and distributing media content have the sole voice in how that content is supplied to audiences. Narrow or misguided distribution plans can too easily miss intended audiences and potentially doom that particular content to obscurity.

Convergence

Through convergence, potential content consumers now have more than one way to access the same content and experience it, whether it be in a large media room or on a small, personal mobile device. And whether your content is text, video, or any other medium, the most important rule is that your content had better be engaging.

Challenges

The array of devices and online platforms mean that content suppliers must take these modes of distribution into account during the production phase. Media firms need to proactively produce content with those end experiences in mind. Missteps here can turn away a loyal audience, pushing them to seek other alternatives.

Opportunities

Convergence now enables firms to reach potential audiences that they may not have had access to through traditional mediums. Convergence also allows potential audiences to experience more than one content option, where traditional media distribution methods required audiences to make choices based on programming schedules.

But traditional firms have also realized the flexibility of new media platforms as avenues to reintroduce or revive older content. The digital remastering, reformatting, and repurposing of pre-existing content has allowed media firms to re-introduce material to the marketplace.

Such activities greatly extend a media material's longevity and its potential for generating additional revenues. For example, with on-demand firms such as Netflix and Amazon Prime providing 24-hour access to many types of movie and series genres including classics, younger audiences can easily binge on iconic television series from past decades such as *Friends*, *The X-Files*, and *Battlestar Galactica* (both the original and remake series).

Partnerships vs. Independence

While digital convergence has, in many cases, made the actual production of content easier, there are no guarantees of success with consumers. Depending on target audiences and intended markets, the production and distribution of media content can be financially risky. Depending on the size and scope of the project, accessing the value of potential partners is one way to reduce and spread some of this exposure.

Easier Is Not Always Better

As emerging technologies have lowered entry barriers for most media and entertainment sectors, the balance between cost and quality has become more apparent. Lower cost equipment and

tools may provide that initial entry and introduction of creative intent, but the varying levels of digital quality available often affect the consumer experience. For example, costs for broadcast news collection and reporting have been greatly reduced as mobile reporters have begun using cellular technology for live transmissions. However, the quality and reliability of these cellular feeds is contingent on network availability and strength at the point of origin. Consumers often experience buffered, choppy, or low-resolution reports as well as dropped transmissions during live news broadcasts.

Expertise vs. DIY

Having access to cheaper equipment and easy-to-use software doesn't ensure the success of a media project. Expertise in the creation, design, and development of a media form will greatly enhance its potential to reach the appropriate audience.

Financially stronger firms may be able to leverage greater technological assets like special effects and sound design to produce richer media content. Think about content that you engage with as a consumer: It's one thing to satisfy your interests, but it has to really sizzle, if you're going to rave about it to a colleague.

DIY can be easy and inexpensive but generally involves an increased amount of trial and error. The learning curve is high but the end result can be successful in its own right. If you have a point to make, you know what you're talking about or writing about, and you have an innovative way of making that point, you can certainly get eyes on a DIY project with its charm. It's not as foolproof, but what's exciting about new media is that anything can go viral if the conditions are right.

Jeanine Cowen is the author of the Berklee Online course from which this lesson comes. See her advice for having a long term mindset in business on the next page, or learn more about the other lessons in this course by clicking the link below.

Interested in exploring this course further?

Learn More



Instructor Spotlight:

Jeanine Cowen

Jeanine Cowan is Chair of the Screen Scoring program at USC Thornton School of Music. She is an active composer, music producer, and technologist, working primarily with sound and music for visual media. Her compositions can be heard in *The Life and Times of Frida Kahlo*, the off-Broadway play *Rapt*, and the game *Lord of the Rings Online: Shadows of Angmar*.

At Berklee Online, Jeanine authored the courses *New Media Economics* and *Professional Film Scoring Skills 1*.

Is understanding music essential to succeed in the business?

While it isn't absolutely necessary to be a musician in order to work in the music business, having a basic musical foundation does provide for a different perspective and lens to understand the creation process.

If you were starting out now and you had to choose one area of the music business to start learning about, which area would you start with?

Copyright is so important! As we have always known, the ownership of intellectual property rights is one of the most powerful levers to have success over time.

What advice do you give musicians who are trying to become more business savvy?

When you make business decisions, try to step back and consider the more long term impacts beyond a few months and into several years. Do your research; if you don't understand something, ask for clarification and seek outside advice.



Celebrity Interview

From Merch Seller to Music Supervisor

By Pat Healy

Janet Billig Rich started in merch sales, which grew to an internship at Caroline Records (where she signed Hole), which led to a career in management (where she managed acts like Nirvana and Dinosaur Jr.) and has now settled into music supervision.

In this excerpt from Berklee Online’s *Music is My Life* podcast, she discusses her long and varied career in the music business.

How important is it for you to love the music of the people you’re working with?

Honestly, it’s hugely important. When I was managing a lot of successful artists, you’d get pushed from lawyers who you worked with or record companies like, “Manage this band. Can you get involved?” People would offer to pay you to manage a band, who would offer you a monthly fee. Honestly, I can’t even make a phone call on behalf of someone I’m not psyched about. I just can’t do it.

So you were an intern at Caroline Records and you signed Hole. How did that happen?

The way I remember it, again, everyone’s memories are different, but I remember we were about to sign Henry Rollins, which I was driving and I was super excited. I was a massive Black Flag fan. At the last minute, he bailed and signed to a major label. This was at the height of the “indie vs. major” culture war. All these punk rock acts—and I think it started with Sonic Youth—were signing to Geffen, so Henry Rollins bailed last-minute on signing to Caroline and signed to a major. I was devastated. As I came into work I was shell-shocked every single day.

I also had this apartment on 7th Street and Avenue C, and whenever bands came to town that I knew they'd stay with me because who could afford a hotel in New York City? I had met Babes in Toyland and they were on tour and they came and stayed at my apartment. This was before cell phones. People would give out my apartment number, that's where they're going to be for a few days while in New York. One night I was at home and Courtney Love called looking for Kat Bjelland from Babes in Toyland; Kat wasn't there.

We ended up talking to each other on the phone. Courtney was like, "You work at a record label. Let me play you some of my music over the phone," which she did. They had just put out their first seven-inch with Sympathy for the Record Industry, and I just thought she was amazing and I was so taken with her as a person on the phone. She was so clear about what she wanted and the path to it.

At the same time that Courtney was calling my apartment, and we were becoming phone buddies, the Henry Rollins thing went down. Then we had a hugely successful album with Primus and then they were going to go sign to Interscope and not deliver the second album to us. I was really broken. I couldn't believe it. Keith Wood, my boss at Caroline said, "What are we going to do? You've got to get out of your funk, you're so down."

I was down about Henry Rollins. I was down about Primus, and I said, “Well, there’s this band in California, I think we should sign them. If we sign them that would totally take me out of my funk, we can make an album with them.” Kim Gordon [of Sonic Youth] should be the producer and we had just made an album with Don Fleming from this band Gumball. So I was like, “Kim and Don could work together. They could produce this album for this band in California called Hole. It’s a no-brainer and that would get me out of my funk.” He was like “done and done, let’s sign them!”

So then what comes next? Is that when you jumped to Gold Mountain Entertainment?

Yeah. That was clearly Hole, that album came out—*Pretty on the Inside*—and just was on its own runway, its own trajectory, and then Nirvana was heating up. The reason I got involved with Nirvana and all the Sub Pop bands was that Caroline had a distribution deal with Sub Pop. So anytime a band would be coming to play in New York for CMJ, Caroline would be their home base. If they had interviews to do or if someone needs to put together a guest list, that would fall to me. When Soundgarden, Mudhoney, Tad, all these bands would come to New York, a lot of them would stay with me at my apartment.

I knew Nirvana the first time they came to New York. They stayed with me. It was the early days. It was before a European tour maybe, and then they came back and stayed with me a few different times. Then I went to a few shows with them. ... But they were definitely a band in my life that I would become friends with. Then when Courtney was at Caroline, I think that's when she went to Chicago when she was going to go see the Pumpkins play because they were at Caroline also, and then that's when she met Kurt in Chicago.



No one ever told me how to be a manager. There's not a book. I think it's all instinct.

- Janet Billig Rich

As a matter of fact, the way she got to Chicago—and I think this is part of the ancient lore—was she got a manager who was a prospective manager who she said, “Well, if you buy me this plane ticket to Chicago maybe you could be our manager.” She was real crafty. I learned a lot from her.

That was going on, Gold Mountain was managing Sonic Youth, John Silva was going to manage Nirvana, so it was like all at that same time. John Silva and Danny Goldberg—who were the principals of Gold Mountain at the time—called me and said, “Why don’t you just manage Courtney and Hole and you all come to Gold Mountain?” I think that in hindsight—and I think Danny’s told me since then—that they just wanted Courtney to be with them and they wanted Nirvana to not be distracted. Courtney was such a big presence in their life at that time. That’s why I ended up with Gold Mountain.

Was there this mythos about her personality yet? When did that develop and did you think that was unfair?

No. Well, she came in with the myth and the legendary status because she had already been to England and she had a relationship with Julian Cope. She was in movies already, *Straight to Hell* and she had a scene in *Sid and Nancy*, and the lore was that she was going to get the role of Nancy like it was real. She already was a massive superstar and had it going on.

When you were asked to manage, how did you learn the ropes of how to do that from working at a label to being the one go-to person—or at least the main go-to person—for performers?

That's a great question. No one ever told me how to be a manager. There's not a book. I think it's all instinct. And I just always go by "pretend to know what you're doing and you'll figure it out." I don't know, because even at Gold Mountain, it's not like John or Danny was ever like, "This is what you should do." I was managing bands. I started managing with Hole and then Danny, somehow, had a relationship with Evan Dando and the Lemonheads. I had known Evan from being in Boston a lot so it was like, "Oh, you should manage Evan. He needs a manager," and I was like, "Great. I love the Lemonheads. I've seen them a hundred times." Then a friend introduced me to Kim Deal who had come into my office for a meeting. I literally had been in my office for probably two weeks. I'd been a manager all of two weeks and Kim came in and said, "I heard on the radio that the Pixies have broken up," and she'd done a Breeders album before it. So she says "I think Breeders is my full-time gig. So, if you're available, you should be our manager."

I'm guessing your confidence was growing and you must have gotten to a point where you didn't have to pretend like you knew what you were doing at that point, right?

I disagree with that because I think you're possibly having to pretend to know what you're doing because no matter how many record deals you make, publishing deals, licenses, every single one's different. So you're constantly having to re-figure out, re-learn.

At the time that Kim Deal walks into your office, what is your "Here's what I can offer you" pitch?

I don't know. I was never much of a pitcher and I think anytime I had to pitch a band, it was just always more casual like, "Yeah, we should do this. This is what my commission rate is and let's do it," and I never had big contracts. We had management agreements that laid out what the permission structure was and I always tell young people, "have your stuff tidy." Your best friend today, your worst enemy tomorrow. Have your deals done, make sure your contracts are signed and all that stuff and everyone's clear about what money you are making, the difference between net and gross. I'm a quick study and learn fast and I just take experiences and learn from them and keep going.

How did you get into music supervision and become a music rights consultant? You were 20 years into your career in the music industry!

I know it's strange. ... I was traveling a lot and I ended up meeting someone. I got married. I got pregnant with twins, which was a surprise. There were no twins in my family, it was like, "What?" I'm like, "You know what? No sweat, I'll rock this, whatever, this will be fine." When my twins were about a year old, I realized you can't do it all. I wanted to be around, I didn't want to be traveling so much and I was traveling a lot, gone 200 nights by the time my kids were a year old. I was like, "This isn't good for anybody."

And at the time, my one-year-olds are more mature and independent than any of my clients and that for me was a real line in the sand.

And I'd started working with Courtney again, Kim Deal, I had a lot of my same old clients from Gold Mountain. So I was working with Courtney, Kim Deal, Guided by Voices, Lisa Loeb, Evan, I think I was working with again at the time. I had an incredible roster, but I was just like, "Oh my God, this is not working," and basically I dropped all my clients and just said like, "Eff it. I'm just going to do whatever comes my way."

And then I made a handful of calls and just called various people I knew and said like, “I’m basically for hire.” I could do whatever. I’m a quick study. One of the first people to call me back was someone who I still work with, his name is Steven Cantor and he’s an incredible filmmaker, and he called me and he said, “I just had my pilot green lit by HBO and I’m going to put you in as the music supervisor,” and I was like, “Awesome! Great! I’ll do that!”

So I called HBO and I spoke to a man named Michael Hamilton who I just recently learned passed away. So sad. He really gave me such a shot, and I said, “I’m the music supervisor in this new series. I haven’t been a music supervisor before, but I’ve done loads of licensing deals. I understand publishing, rights holders, masters in an incredibly deep way,” because I’d made so many record deals and I’ve licensed so much music. All the clients I had did licenses for television and films over the years, so I really had a big understanding of it, and Steven, who hired me, knew exactly what music he wanted.

I wasn’t a music supervisor in the sense of like “you should put this song in this scene.” It wasn’t that at all. Steven knew what he wanted. I was just the facilitator. Michael at HBO was like, “No

problem. Here's our templates. I'll show you exactly what to do." He just basically taught me how to be a clearance person. I did that series and then HBO hired me to do, I don't know, I think I did four or five documentaries for them that year and all of a sudden I had a clearance business, and then shortly after that, Matt Weaver called me with an idea for a musical that he wanted to do, and I'd learned how to clear music for theater. That brought me to *Rock of Ages*, which was an amazing moment in my career because it was just as exciting as other huge moments.

Yeah, but a little bit safer, right?

Oh my God. What's so exciting about being a producer in theater, and I shared this with some of my old management colleagues, was that like, if you have a client that doesn't want to get onstage or is having a tantrum about something and you're the manager, you're screwed. The band is not going onstage. No one is getting paid, it upends the entire thing. In theater, if someone doesn't want to get up onstage, there's an understudy! No one has tantrums. Everyone is an adult. They're all incredibly happy to be there. They all know how lucky they are.

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Instructor Spotlight:

Stephen Canfield

Stephen Canfield is an expert in global brand strategy, currently serving as the Director of Brand Marketing at Airbnb. Prior to that, he worked as Vice President of Marketing for WeTransfer and program director for Red Bull Sound Select. He graduated from Berklee College of Music with his degree in Music Business/Management.

At Berklee Online, Stephen co-authored the graduate course *Music Marketing: Strategy for Consumer Brands*.

What attracted you to the business side of the industry?

Working on the business side gives you the chance to work across all genres and multiple industries, and it can be incredibly rewarding if you do it for the right reasons.

Tell us about your musical background.

I grew up writing songs and playing in bands. I came to Berklee to study guitar, but I realized that I wasn't as good as the people in my headphones. That led me to enroll in music business courses, where I found an interest in marketing and communications.

Who do you admire for making the most of their brand?

I fell in love with Run the Jewels on their first record and was fortunate enough to produce a show with them. It's been amazing to see Killer Mike amplify his voice as an activist.

What's the biggest lesson you learned in the music business?

Quality and attention to detail matter, and they're not worth sacrificing to get to the easy answer.

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