



Virtual realities

The benefits of marketing your work on the web

When The Golden Dogs landed a plum gig playing Popkomm in Germany, the Toronto indie band needed to ramp up its international promotion. Instead of plastering Berlin with posters, the members took to the web and created a MySpace account — one specifically for Germans. The site mimics the band's primary MySpace page, but the bio is in German and their 131 friends are mostly from Germany. "I thought setting a page up would bring people out to our show," says Jess Grassia, the band's singer and keyboardist. "I searched for people who were in Berlin who looked like they were into music and invited a bunch of people to our site."

Grassia's not the only one using MySpace, along with other online communities like YouTube and Flickr, as a marketing tool. More than three million music acts use the Fox Interactive Media-owned site to share streaming songs, tour info and videos. "Word of mouth has always been one of the best ways to discover music, and MySpace has built upon that component," says Janis Nixon, senior marketing manager for Universal Music's New Media department. "It's a built-in community where you can communicate with other like-minded people who share your interests."

The site's viral nature — spreading content from one person to the next — is one of the main reasons sites like MySpace and YouTube are so successful. "When you see, hear or read something that you want to share because it was funny, gross, great, cool or awful, you will share it if it's relatively easy to do," says Kevin Leflar, president of Official Community, a company that builds online sites and communities for bands such as Blue Rodeo. Viral communication works, he says, because "the base level of like-minded people is large in an assembled community."

It also helps that a MySpace page is easy to set up, and connecting with online friends is even easier. A few clicks on the "add friends"



button and you've got yourself an entire network of people to share your songs with.

With more than 120 million accounts — including SOCAN's pages, which were launched in the summer — MySpace is clearly the winner in the online community wars. It owes its success to sites such as Mp3.com, which was one of the first music file-sharing sites. Launched in 1998, Mp3.com allowed bands to upload music, photos and bios for free. But it never took off. "It was ahead of its time," says Nixon. "People weren't as savvy at that point."

In April 2004, MySpace Music launched, and because Mp3.com no longer existed in its original form, musicians and fans were eager to find a community where they could share tunes. A month later, My Chemical Romance joined the site, and six months after, R.E.M. posted its new album, *Around the Sun*, on its page and legitimized MySpace as a place to find new music. "MySpace has been key," says Richard Terfry, better known as **Buck 65**. "When you're not getting played on the radio, you need to take full advantage of outlets like this." Terfry has seen the benefits of maintaining a MySpace page first hand. He says a lot of

people have discovered his music and then gone to shows because of his site. "I'd go so far as to say it's made a big difference," he says.

While winning over new fans with free music and videos is clearly beneficial, there's still one problem: royalties. Artists don't get compensated for number of plays or if someone adds a song to their own MySpace playlist. **Neville Quinlan**, general manager of **PeerMusic Canada**, a Toronto-based music publisher, says that while streaming songs on MySpace is good for publicity, the music community is in the process of dealing with compensation. "We're going through the process now of making sure things are licensed and, as these sites become larger revenue-generators, the people who actually write the content get paid for it."

Until that happens, though, bands and their fans will continue to use MySpace as a place to connect free of charge. With 250,000 new signups a day, Nixon doesn't see the site's popularity slowing down. "If the integrity of MySpace continues," she says, "then the community will continue." —Bryan Borzykowski
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