



## Mailing Lists

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The very first piece of business you should attend to is starting and maintaining a mailing list. Your mailing list will be your most direct and personal link to your fans and entertainment industry contacts-- in many ways, the mailing list can be considered the “business lifeblood” of a developing artist.

Keep your mailing list on computer, using any good database program. I have found Microsoft Access to be very versatile and easy to use, but any good database software should suffice. Remember to back up your mailing list by keeping identical copies on both your hard drive and a removable disk.



You will want to keep the following information about each member of your mailing list: name, snail-mail (i.e. regular postal) address, email address, and perhaps telephone number. Other fields you may want to consider including are company affiliation and job title (if applicable) or school address (if applicable and if your act does/will appeal to a college fanbase).

### Building Your Mailing List

Start your mailing list by personally adding all the folks you think would support your act, and all your entertainment industry contacts you want to keep posted on any new developments. As a test, in addition to your industry contacts, your list should include everyone who would come to a show or would buy/download your music. In other words, if your grandmother who lives in another state would buy a CD, she very much belongs on the mailing list. You will find that apart from industry contacts, these early members are mostly friends and family-- that’s both normal and acceptable. Don’t think that because they’re close to you or your band they somehow “don’t count.” In your early days, where else do you expect to get your support? Remember this important piece of advice: *every single name on the mailing list makes a difference.*

If you are a band, I suggest that one bandmember maintain the mailing list and that once a week, every bandmember must submit 10 new names to the mailing list until you exhaust your collective resources of appropriate friends, family, contacts, etc. Be aggressive about your mailing list. Whenever you bump into an old friend or acquaintance on the street and they ask you what’s new, tell them about your act and ask them for their information to include on your mailing list. You’ll find that as you grow busier with your musical career, your mailing list becomes a good way to keep in touch with people, especially those folks you don’t see often.

You must also solicit new names for your mailing list after shows. Prepare one or more clipboards, each loaded with several signup sheets. Each signup sheet should have sections clearly marked for name, address, and email. Space permitting, it may be useful to include a section on “comments” to see what new fans thought of your act. Remember that people may be filling out these sheets in a dark bar or venue and will therefore need to write in big letters, so don’t put too many signup boxes on each sheet, and make sure there is plenty of space for each entry-- I recommend no more than four new signups per sheet. Make each signup sheet look professional and presentable-- have them designed on computer, or if they’re hand-made, be extremely neat. Adding artwork or some other creative presentation can never hurt, but remember that the most important thing with the signup sheets is that they are easy to use.

Provide potential fans with thick, dark-colored pens, again keeping in mind that they may be writing in a dark bar or venue. If possible, go the extra step and bring a penlight with you to make it even easier for them to fill out the form.

At the risk of sounding like a sexist asshole, I’m going to offer the following piece of advice because no one else may tell it to you, and it can quite literally be the difference between 100 and 600 names on your mailing list in the early days of your career. So forgive me, and here goes: I recommend that an attractive and

friendly/personable woman walk around with each clipboard and solicit additions to your mailing list. It is actually a statistically-proven fact that audience members-- *both male and female*-- are more likely to fill out a mailing list signup form when asked by an attractive and friendly/personable woman. I'm not exactly sure why that is, but it's definitely a truth I have observed through years of experience. Try it and see for yourself.

You or any band member who is not selling merchandise after the show can also assist with soliciting names for the mailing list, because potential fans may want to say hello and that can be a good opportunity to solicit signup. However, your friends and your bandmates' friends who are already on the list will also want to say hello-- so what was supposed to be an excursion into the crowd to collect names can easily turn into a series of lengthy conversations with friends. It is more ideal to have a friend or several friends of the band deal with the mailing list and have band members selling merchandise behind a booth or table where they can still say hello to their friends while generating and controlling customer traffic.



### Using Your Mailing List

Your mailing list is your lifeline to your fans, supporters, and industry contacts. You should use it regularly to keep in touch with list members and let them know what you've been up to. Even if it has been a fairly inactive period for your act, let the list members know that you're still around but taking some time off from the public eye. One common mistake many developing artists make is using their mailing list only to promote an upcoming show. Your mailing list should be an informational source, like a regular newsletter, informing list members not only about your shows, but new CD releases, new additions to your website, new career developments, funny stories from the road (if you're on tour), etc. On average, you should send a mailing to your list about once a month.

Of course, sending snail-mail or regular postal mailings to a large mailing list can be very expensive-- the cost of producing mass flyers and newsletters in addition to the costs of mass postage can add up to depleting your budget. Don't be surprised if in your early days, the money you make from your shows barely covers the cost of mailing announcements about those same shows to your list. Depending on the size of your mailing list, it may be cost-effective to sign up for U.S. Bulk Mail Service, which gives you a per-letter/postcard discount on very large mailings. But there are several restrictions to Bulk Mail Service; call your local post office for more details.

And remember that email is free. There is no reason why you can't send at least one email a month to your entire list in newsletter format. But keep these emails on the shorter side, noting the most pertinent details up front-- most folks don't like to receive and wade through lengthy emails. There are more specific details on how to use online [mailing lists](#) in the StarPolish section on Music and the Internet.

If you can afford it, also send monthly postal mailings to bolster your emails (the regular mail pieces can be more lengthy and informative than the emails). But if you can't afford it, focus on the emails and only use the regular post to announce very special events or developments, like a particularly important upcoming show or the release of a new record. Remember that if you are promoting a concert, you need to mail your postal mailings 10-14 days in advance so they arrive well before the upcoming show date. Finally, remember to draw a balance between keeping in touch and being a pain in the ass-- regular mailings/emails are important, but several messages a week are annoying.

Apart from being a lifeline to your fans and contacts, your mailing list is one of your most valuable "calling cards" to the entertainment industry: People who work in the industry-- from A & R talent scouts to club owners-- are always impressed with large mailing lists. In the same way they are impressed with a large number of CDs sold, your mailing list is a quantifiable way of noting how popular you are. Once you've built a large mailing list, mention its existence and the total number of people on it in appropriate business cover letters.

Never remove a name from your mailing list unless you are confident that the address(es) attached to that name

are outdated. However, if someone asks to be removed from the mailing list, be professional and remove him or her immediately. But remember that every name counts.

Never forget that a large mailing list is both an important tool and an impressive asset.