



The Urban Music Industry: The Business Team

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Managers and Personal Management

Ideally, you as an artist are occupied doing two predominant things: making/writing music and performing music. As such, you ought not have the time and likely do not have the business acumen to handle all the strategic aspects of your career. That's where a manager comes in. Also, as an artist you will need somebody you trust to look objectively at your creative product, the thing to be marketed and distributed. It is impossible for you to perceive yourself objectively. You need someone who is aligned with your interest but can be objective, give you the straight story and go out in the world and advocate for you. Because a manager is such a critical member of your team, StarPolish has an entire section devoted to [management](#) that outlines the role and responsibilities of the manager and how/when to find one, as well as an entire section on legal aspects of the [management contract](#). You should review both those sections now.

Here is some advice specifically for an urban artist as far as what to look for in a manager. Of course, you want somebody who is enthusiastic, who is going to come out to your gigs and support you when you're small, somebody who has integrity. But this I can't stress enough-- you need someone who is willing to sit down with you and explain all the aspects of something important that you need to decide upon right away, before you sign anything. Artists leaping at their first real break, and ruining the day they signed their careers away was the standard mode of behavior for urban artists and the history of urban music. Remember that, ideally, once your management contract is signed with the manager, you should be partners in the sense of being on the same side of the table in all your other negotiations.

Also make sure to find someone who understands the urban music market, since the urban music business is different from the rest of the music business in many ways. You also need a manager who has a temperament for the proper conduct of business. I draw this distinction deliberately in contrast to monkey business, or thuggery, or other models we've all seen. If you are the artist and you are being courted primarily with bottles of champagne and jewelry, you may want to ask yourself why? Sure, you believe in your music, you think it's good and you can understand why anyone would want to work with you. But, why would you reason that someone who would induce you to sign with bribes is going to give you a proper disclosure of all your business affairs once you sign, let alone ideal representation?

Legal Representation: Lawyers

The use of lawyers in the urban music industry is the same as in the rest of the music industry-- anytime you are about to negotiate a major contract, you need a music attorney representing your interests. Now is a good time to review StarPolish's section dedicated to music [attorneys](#), which outlines the role of the music lawyer, how to find one, how they charge, etc. It has been my experience that attorneys play very prominent roles in the careers of their clients. It's revolutionary how in recent years, entertainment attorneys have been able to drastically renegotiate and even void (!) the recording deals of their high-profile urban clients (think Prince, TLC, Miss Jones, etc). When you are an established artist with leverage and a demand for the product, your recording contracts and your publishing contracts carry enormous import as far as dictating what your future economic livelihood will be.

Booking Agents

Getting a booking agent at one point or another is going to be a necessity of the music business as well. If your act can't perform live, you're missing out a lot of potential revenue. Be shrewd and look and see who represents clients who play in the genre and style that you play. Are they represented by the major agencies CAA, William Morris, or ICM? Large booking agencies are extremely unlikely to sign you if you are not signed to a record contract. But you may find a smaller booking agency that will be willing to take you on. I have talked to artist development people at major labels who feel that getting a booking agent is harder than getting a record deal. As with finding other good members for your business team, [networking](#) is key, but also refer to the StarPolish [Database](#).

Visual material can not only help you get gigs, but may also be useful materials to include in your presentation kits for booking agents. If you put a performance on video that was particularly compelling, you can help sell home the point of what you are doing. Technologies on the web with Real Video extend this possibility even further.

Agents typically expect 10 to 15 per cent of the gross revenues for the shows they book, so make sure you take that relationship on appropriately-- i.e., even if you are able to convince a booking agent to take you on, make sure that there will be a demand for your bookings. Don't be greedy; many artists have had to do some sort of a "sufferer's tour" to generate sufficient demand such that when they come back on the next tour they can then start earning real money. You may not be able to quit your day job, but depending upon the type of music that you do, you may, at the appropriate time, have to go out and support your recorded music with live presentations.

One of the things that is really exciting about working in urban music is the entrepreneurial spirit of those players-- independent records are released, independent singles hit the radio and this creates a buzz that translates into a demand for live performance.

While an agent is a critical business member to add to your team, there is a good deal you can do on your own to book shows for your act. StarPolish has several comprehensive sections that you should review on booking shows at [colleges](#), alternative/nontraditional [venues](#), [local venues and clubs](#), and small [national tours](#).