



Music Videos And Video Promotion

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Should You Make A Music Video?

Obviously, you can't perform video promotion unless you have a music video to promote. So the first question should be: Is it cost-effective to make a music video? The answer is: usually not. I generally do not recommend making a music video unless someone else is paying for the production costs, such as a record label, an [angel investor](#), or some other party.*



*But be careful to note whether those costs can be recouped (i.e. taken out) from future income streams-- we'll worry about recoupment later when we discuss record deals in a special StarPolish section, currently under construction but coming soon. In the meanwhile, sign our [mailing list](#) to be informed when new content is added.

I'm against music videos for emerging artists for a simple reason: The costs associated with music videos usually outweigh the realistic benefits. The costs of making an airplay-quality video can be immense, ranging on the low end from \$150,000 to \$250,000 for a simple video, to \$500,000 and into the millions for elaborate movie-quality clips. Digital technology and digital cameras are lowering the costs, but not by enough to still make affordable and airplay-quality music videos. Finally, even if you have an airplay-quality video, it is extremely difficult-- bordering on impossible-- for a developing band to obtain meaningful video airplay (but carefully read our guidelines below).

While the Internet does provide an additional opportunity for developing artists' videos to be seen, webcasts still only reach a small percentage of net-users who have fast enough connections and who don't mind looking at a post-it size video screen of shoddy transfer quality. [IMNTV](#) (Independent Music Network TV) is one site dedicated to developing artists and claims they will help you "Get Huge" via broadcasts of your music videos-- but it hasn't happened to any artists yet, and I'll believe it only when I see it. As of today, music video webcasts are not helpful in building a fanbase and exposing your music, and the music industry has yet to recognize any significant amount of music video webcasts as an accomplishment. So, don't think that the existence of the web is itself a reason to go out and spend money making a music video.



If you are determined to finance a music video, or if you can find someone who is a filmmaker and promises to shoot a great video for you at little or no cost (i.e. a friend or film student who wants to build their resume), first take a look at the budget and think about any possible hidden or ancillary costs that may have been inadvertently ignored. There is a great deal of expense that goes into making even the simplest video outside of the cost of the actors and filmmakers: costs of the actual film; costs of developing and editing, location permits, set and/or costume costs; lighting costs; audio mixing and editing costs; etc. Make sure that you have a fixed price before producing a video, or if you are given an estimate, set a ceiling beyond which the producer/filmmaker will cover additional costs, if any. Also keep in mind that assuming you plan to send the video out to multiple video stations, you will need to pay for duplication costs, which can be up to a few dollars per videotape, depending on the total quantity ordered and the tape format that the video shows you are targeting require (often this will be beta-- check first before ordering mass quantities of any format). Basically, protect yourself from any unpleasant future financial surprises by making sure you have the money to spend before producing a music video.

Also, fully read the Video Promotion section below before committing to making a music video and ask yourself which of the tasks outlined you think you will be able to accomplish. If you find yourself realizing that there will be nothing meaningful you can do with a music video, then your funds are better spent somewhere other than video production. That being said, read on...

What to Include

If you want to get your songs into films, television and potential soundtracks, don't send 25 songs, and don't send excerpts. Instead, send one CD with about seven whole songs -- 10 is okay, but never more than that. I personally get dizzy when someone sends me a CD packed full of 80 minutes of songs (or score) with headings and genres outlined; it's simply overwhelming. No one has time to sit and listen and read all of that. Believe me, if they like the first couple of songs/cues, they will want to listen to the whole CD and call you (or take your follow up call) to hear more.

If you have a bio or resume which outlines other television programs, films or soundtracks you have had your music in, by all means include that, if not, it's nice to try to put just a small bio together. Attach it to the CD or, even insert it inside the jewel case. You can even just include a business card with a nice cover letter, which includes some of your background information, education, etc.

Video Promotion

Before you read any further, please study the StarPolish content on [radio promotion](#), as video and radio promotion hold close similarities on many levels. Rather than repeat myself here, you'd be better served by reading that already detailed section first.

1. MTV And VH1

The two most influential national/international video stations are the all-powerful MTV and VH1 (which, incidentally, are both owned by MTV Networks, which is itself owned by Viacom). I must be up front with you: It is a waste of time to even attempt to contact MTV or VH1 unless you are signed to a recording contract or if there is some truly extraordinary story surrounding your act. Being musically different/great is not enough. If you are a signed act with a music video, then your record label's Video Promotion Department should be making the calls and promoting your video to MTV Networks, and your manager should be making sure that your label is doing the best job it can.



If you are an unsigned act with a truly remarkable story, then you can attempt to contact a member of MTV or VH1's Programming Board to discuss adding your video to the station's playlist. You should also contact the News Department to discuss including your story as a news piece-- if you successfully accomplish this, you can try to parlay that feat into an add for the video. If you pursue either of these routes, fully review the rest of the content below, as well as the [radio promotion](#) section for advice on making your pitch, and the [networking](#) section for advice on making and working contacts. And you must, of course, use your truly remarkable story as the pitch's anchor.

If you are an unsigned band without a truly remarkable story, you're pretty much out of luck with MTV and VH1, because they simply don't play videos by independent artists. In fact, if you're seeking a record deal, look for a label with good Video Production and Video Promotion Departments, and try to get the label to commit in the record contract to making a music video for you (though that may be a difficult commitment to obtain). One of the major benefits of signing a record deal is obtaining the ability to make music videos and access to national commercial video promotion.

Additionally, unsigned acts should monitor MTV's and VH1's new specialty shows. Every so often, one of the stations will add a new specialty show to its programming that includes videos by unsigned acts (MTV's former program "Indie Outing" is one excellent, although unfortunately, short-lived example). If a new specialty show is announced that makes sense for your act and/or its video, contact the Programming Department immediately to pitch your inclusion on the show and obtain an add for your video.

2. BET, CMT, The Box, Much Music (And Other Nationals And Semi-Nationals)

While it may seem that MTV Networks has a virtual international monopoly on the music video industry, there are definitely a few other video stations that operate on a national or semi-national (i.e. in most major cities) basis that you should be aware of and that can be very instrumental in exposing new talent.



In America, these stations include BET (Black Entertainment Television, catering to an urban audience), CMT (Country Music Television), and The Box (multi-format, but leaning toward urban and modern rock/pop). Also worth noting is the extremely influential Much Music, which dominates the music video industry in Canada. For the most part, all these stations seem to share attitudes similar to MTV Networks in dealing with unsigned developing artists... but we will discuss each one in greater detail in a separate section that's currently under construction and coming soon. In the meanwhile, join the StarPolish [mailing list](#) to be informed when new sections are added.

3. Local Video List

MTV and VH1 may be meaningful *national* video stations, but depending on your target market(s) there may also exist meaningful local video stations that do not have the reach of an MTV but are extremely popular and influential within the local target market. Some of these local video stations promote or sponsor local concerts and music-related events, and some even have television kiosks in cafeterias and record stores, further expanding their audience and reach. Good examples are Boston's RageTV and Colorado's Music Link. Several colleges also have TV stations that shouldn't be ignored as marketing channels due to their popularity with sometimes sizable student bodies. Most colleges that have a television station also have a music video program (or would be willing to start one). But be careful to research the effectiveness of each college station to avoid wasting your time working with one whose signal is so weak that few students watch or even know that it exists.

College and local video stations will be much more willing to work with developing artists than the nationals, so start your video promotion efforts by compiling a list of video stations (or their respective music programs) in the target market where you would like your video played. Don't forget cable-access stations, and be sure to research the existence of possibly influential college stations that you may not be aware of.

Start with the StarPolish [Database](#) for both references of video stations/programs in your target market(s), as well as the important contact information. However, I also strongly recommend that you supplement whatever information you get from StarPolish with your own list that you compile from scratch. While we update our database often, the music industry moves quickly, new stations and programs may open up and contact information may change rapidly, so you may uncover new information in your target markets faster than we do. Also, remember that you are clearly not the only artist who will be using the StarPolish [Database](#). You should strive to stand apart from other artists by working with a personal, more comprehensive list, specifically suited to your act. In other words, supplementing our database with your own video list may be a tedious task, but it's worth the effort.

4. Servicing Local Video

Servicing video stations/programs is exactly like [servicing radio](#). However, unlike radio, in *most cases* with local video there will only be a single contact at the video station/program that you need to develop a relationship with-- as opposed to an entire staff of directors and VJ's. This contact may be the head of the station or the director of the program; you must determine for yourself who your most valued and influential contact will be.

5. Adds And Tracking

The process of obtaining an add and performing [tracking](#) is similar to that in radio promotion, except, of course, you should add a visual slant to your pitch-- that is, if your band has a particular look, as well as a particular sound, it will be of particular importance to a video station.

Don't be as concerned with chart numbers as you would be with radio promotion. Many local video and college stations do not report their playlists, and so there is no proper standard for local video charts. The truth is, unless it's on MTV or VH1's individual charts (each has its own chart, which is listed weekly in Billboard magazine's "Programming" section), ranking on a video chart doesn't have the ancillary benefits that ranking on a radio chart does. Of course it's always valuable to be able to quote a high statistic in any pitch or conversation about your act, but concentrate your efforts on getting the add and increasing the tracking on a station-by-station basis, primarily for exposure and not numerical purposes/leverage.

6. Interviews/Performances

Solicit videotaped interviews for your act in conjunction with pitching adds and increased rotation for your video. Go into these pitches keeping the same things in mind as you do when you're making your add pitches, but include the visual angle as much as is appropriate: A videotaped interview will be particularly effective if you have an unusual look or a magnetic personality in the band. If you don't interview well and look uncomfortable on camera, I still suggest you go ahead with videotaped interviews as practice toward learning how to work with the camera, which is an integral skill for an entertainer to master.

You may remember that in the [Introductory Groundrules](#), we recommend that you personally videotape all your shows and some rehearsals, if only for internal purposes-- to see how you look on-screen and suggest ways to improve your presence. If you are diligent about videotaping your act and critically studying the videotapes, you will quickly grow more comfortable on camera and will be better in videotaped interviews.

While it's of course true that interviews are easier to obtain from stations that are already playing your videos and have been supportive of your act, it is not uncommon to convince a station to interview your band in advance of obtaining a proper add. As is the case on radio, sometimes a good interview will be exactly the thing that convinces a wavering station to add your video into regular rotation. Moreover, I've found that local video stations or their relevant programs are more willing than radio stations to videotape band interviews or press conferences when an artist is in town for a performance. These interviews usually take place at soundcheck before the show or in a creative location specific to the market (a local landmark, a popular cafe or store, etc.). As much as possible, ask that the interview take place in a location where you know you will be comfortable. Some stations/programs will further videotape portions of a concert for re-broadcast, and even reactions from fans afterward. If an interview is set up that's not in conjunction with a show, you should ask if it could include a brief special performance of a song or two (usually done acoustically due to lower associated production costs).

Videotaped pieces can be very effective, especially in cases where the station will re-broadcast the segment several times. And of course they are an excellent way to obtain additional marketing value from a video station/program outside of simply getting them to play your video. Make sure to get copies of any videotaped segment you are in. These will be useful for archival purposes, and if something comes out particularly well, it might be appropriate for inclusion in your [press kit](#).

Once you have set up an interview, there is a variety of critical things you must do and ensure in advance of the interview-- and these are the same as the guidelines for [press interviews](#).

7. Special Promotions

In addition to soliciting adds, rotation increases, and interviews/performances, you should periodically design special promotions with your video stations. These should be as outstanding as possible, but some simple guidelines include local video station or program sponsorship of your shows or special events, contests and basic promotional [item](#) giveaways, creative [cross-promotions](#) between a video station and a record store or other marketing channel, etc. Keep in mind that video stations will be interested in promotions that look good on camera-- high-visibility happenings will be the most attractive option to present when soliciting a specialty promotion with a local video station or music television program.