

# how to get a record deal, or not

## Introduction

As an artist attorney I have been involved with a number of artists in soliciting (or "shopping") their material to record companies. While working with these artists I have picked up a number of "do's" and "don't's" along the way which I have outlined below.

### 1. Build It, They'll Come

Good artists deserving of record company interest generally get record company interest by doing what artists should do: playing good shows and writing good songs. A manager, attorney or agent can help accelerate the interest of record companies but can't close deals. The artist should focus on live shows and songs. Without these, the best representation in the world can't help you. Keep developing your independent story as you work at gaining record company interest - it will compliment your pursuit.

### 2. Patient Team Choices

Be careful about who you add to your team (i.e. manager, band members, lawyer, etc.). These choices impact on your long-term prospects. Don't add a team member because you think you must have them to speak for you. Good music speaks for itself. You can add team members after record company interest is secured. The quality of team member options will increase in proportion to your self-made success. Bad team members can greatly impair your ability to secure record company interest.

### 3. Three to Four Songs On The Demo

You should shop your best three to four songs to record companies. Many artists produce a full length CD with 12-15 songs and expect the A&R representative to sift through all the material. The reality is they listen to about 45 seconds of the first two songs and if this isn't piquing their interest they are moving onto the next artist. If you are fortunate enough to pique their interest they will listen to the three or four songs repeatedly. Familiarity breeds a further appreciation for the music. If the A&R person wants more songs they will ask *after* they

have become addicted to the first three or four songs. It's very hard to get addicted to 12-15 songs.

### 4. Photos, Bios

Photos and bios are important but they don't matter unless the music gets someone's interest. If you have a choice between spending \$1 on photos/bios vs. \$1 on the music - spend on the music.



by Chris Taylor

### 5. Play The Songs On The Demo

When you perform the "showcase set" for the A&R person play all the songs that appeared on the demo you sent him/her weeks earlier. I've seen many groups elect to play their "newer", "fresher" material when A&R reps are in the house. Why? Don't drop these well-liked, road-tested songs from your set. Your fans, nor the A&R people have heard them as much as you have. Play them.

### 6. Shorter Is Better

When you perform the "showcase set" for the A&R person the ideal set length is 30-35 minutes. Many of the great artists in the

world have difficulty delivering inspiring, full-on performances beyond this length. There is nothing to gain from playing any longer.

### 7. First Things First

Play two of your best songs within the first three songs. If you can hook people on the first few songs they won't leave for the whole set. If you bore them in the first couple of songs there is a good possibility that they will leave or loose interest.

### 8. Let The Music Do The Talking

No one can talk a record company into signing them. Either the music is striking a chord with the A&R person or not. You won't get signed by winning a debate with the company about whether your music "appeals to 'the kids'" or about how hard you will work. Give it a rest and write some more songs.

### 9. Be Open To Suggestions

You are dealing with record company people who take great pride in being able to do their job well. I've seen too many artists proceed to tell A&R people how to produce, market and promote their music with very little room left for record company involvement. Realize that you are not the only expert in this regard but rather an important contributor to the process. You can lose record company interest at this stage even if the music you have produced has passed the test. Listen; you might learn something.

### 10. Music Matters

Don't get caught up in the pursuit of a record deal. Many of the artists that I have had the good fortune to help find record deals weren't possessed with the idea of getting one. It often takes three to five years of development, if you're lucky, before an artist is ready to make the leap to being a major label recording artist. Have fun and enjoy the trip along the way. Focus on the music.

*Chris Taylor is a music lawyer with the law firm of Sanderson Taylor and works with Choclair, Sum 41, McAuley, Jacksoul and Prozzäk among others. Find them online at [www.sandersonstaylor.com](http://www.sandersonstaylor.com).*