

Generating Buzz

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Independent Rock Bands Can Mobilize Their Fan Base Online.

Anna Fraone

Countless unsigned or independent-label pop musicians are creating their own web sites to boost their self-promotion efforts.

In a city like Boston, with a hot music scene, it's common for local bands to have their own web site. But that wasn't the case just a few years ago.

"Most people were not web savvy, or they didn't even have computers at home," says Shaun Wolf Wortis, lead guitarist and singer of the Boston-based band Slide, who posted the first incarnation of his band's web site in late 1995. The site, slide.com, now averages around 3000 visits each month. "At that time, I remember that 100 visitors a year seemed like a lot," he says.

Back then, a mention to a Slide fan that his band had a web site was mostly met with blank stares and comments like, "Next time I'm in a 'cybercafe,' I'll try to remember to find you guys," recalls Wortis.

Now, however, a mention on a popular site can send visitor numbers through the roof. On July 7, 1999, shockwave.com, a site that specializes in entertainment software, awarded "site of the day" to another Boston-based unsigned band, the Control Group (the-control-group.com). That day the band's site received 5000 unique visits, according to guitarist and vocalist Andrew King. For the next few months, the site received an average of 10,000 visits a week—sometimes as much as 20,000, said King.

At the time, the Control Group site offered a free CD if you e-mailed the group your mailing address. The band only printed 1000 copies of the CD, and email requests from fans exceeded the supply by several thousands.

For small-time acts, it can be awfully gratifying to see popular web sites offer the same type of exposure to independent artists as it does to major label artists.

Shockwave.com showcases a video in its music section from the unsigned Boston band Jim's Big Ego (bigego.com), next to Beck and The Cure.

"The web is an easy way to suck in people who really love music, because the visuals and the sounds keep all the cycles of the brain going," says Jim Infantino of Jim's Big Ego. "Someday, web sites will be what bands are all about. After the live experience, it'll be the most satisfying thing."

And even when a band gets signed to a major label, fans apparently still love to check the web site. The unofficial site of the Old 97's (hitbyatrain.com) an alternative-country band from Texas that is now signed to Elektra, received a mere 900 hits back in 1995. The site now currently receives an average of 9,000 visits a month, says

site designer Frank Early. Around the time of the band's first major label release, Early ran a contest for visitors to fill out a form detailing the times they called radio stations to request an Old

97's song. The list of radio stations to target was supplied by the label, and members of the Old 97's signed paraphernalia and donated special items as prizes. Early got an email from the web master of one of the radio stations, saying that receiving e-mail from an "entire fan base of a band at once gets a little annoying. I have forwarded your requests though."

So log on, rock on. If you've got a band, and you want to generate a buzz, the one cheap place to start is the Internet. •

For much more info on promoting your band on the Internet, and a guide to indie music magazines, go to steamtunnels.net and search for keyword "indie."



SLIDE



indie bands to check out on the Internet:



Angry Salad
angrysalad.com



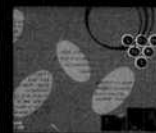
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Wheat
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