



Discovered Online: A Musician's Guide To Being Found On The Internet

Vol 1

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Introduction

Being a musician isn't easy. Making a living from music *certainly* isn't. If you're happy to play guitar in the evenings with your friends, and rely on a 'regular job' for your income, that takes a lot of pressure off the business side of things. It does mean that you spend most of your day not making music, of course.

This is a scenario that most musicians will find themselves in at some point.

So what are the alternatives? In these days of free downloads and infinite supply, is there still a way for musicians to earn their keep?

Of course there is. (In fact, there are many ways).

But that's not what this guide is about.

Although the economic models of the music industry are changing, the underlying desire of people to listen to new and exciting music remains undiminished (forgive the minor pun).

So, people want to listen to good music. Let's assume that you're making good music. It seems like the rest should take care of itself, but unfortunately it's rarely that simple. Plenty of great music goes unheard, and we are regularly bombarded with chart hits of questionable quality. There are obviously forces at work here that extend far beyond the music itself.

That's not what this guide is about either.

I don't profess to be an expert in breaking new bands, or a soothsayer of the record industry apocalypse. However, I can confidently state that the Internet will become an ever more important promotional tool for musicians over the coming months and years. It may even become *essential*.

The Internet can provide a primary source of revenue for bands; it can be a more powerful platform for building a fanbase than any communications medium previously conceived. A band that effectively leverages the promotional potential of the Internet will have a huge advantage over those that don't.

Now we're getting to what this guide is about.

If you want to reach as many people as possible with your music, and maximise your chances of earning a decent income from doing what you love, then you need to have the following things:

- a professional online presence
- a coherent strategy
- plenty of dedication
- great music

Now, by ‘professional’ I don’t mean a website that looks like a corporate wet-wipe; I mean something that doesn’t come across as amateur. A MySpace page would fall into this latter category, for example (although MySpace pages should be treated differently to your own website - but we’ll come back to this later).

So what *is* this guide about?

This guide will provide advice on how to establish an effective online presence for your band. I’ll be exposing some useful information in these areas:

Registering a domain (*and choosing a band name*)

Purchasing web hosting (*or getting it for free*)

Creating a blog using Wordpress (*or a static site*)

Optimising your blog/website (*on-page optimisation*)

Promoting your blog/website (*link building*)

If you follow these pointers, you will already have a huge head-start over the majority of new artists. This isn’t a comprehensive guide to SEO (search engine optimisation) or to online music promotion, but it will help you get started on the right note.

Of course, *‘it ain’t what you do, it’s the way that you do it’* – but at least now you should have some idea about the *what*. Whether online or offline, first impressions are vital – so make sure they count in your favour.

1. A Band By Any Other Name – Registering A Domain

Never underestimate the value of a good name. The Internet is built on words, and words lead people to where they want to go (whether they know it or not).

There are a lot of websites where anyone can go and set up a profile for their band, post a few photos and some mp3s. This is well worth doing, but it isn't enough. A MySpace page can be a very useful networking tool, but it shouldn't be your main band page. You need to set yourself apart from the millions of other bands who also have MySpace pages; you need to show that you're serious about what you're doing (even if your music is all about having fun).

These are just some of the reasons why you need your own domain name, and why it should be easy to remember.

Is this name taken?

If you already have a band name, the first thing you should do is check to see if the .com has been registered by someone else. Unless you've got a particularly odd name, chances are the domain is already gone.

Type the name of your band (without spaces) into the address bar at the top of the browser, put a dot-com at the end, then hit return. If you arrive at a web page, then the domain has already been registered.

If you arrive at an error screen, then you might be in luck. However, this is not a guarantee that the domain is available. You can use a resource such as <http://www.allwhois.com> to see if it has any registration information for the domain.

You can also use any domain registration service to check availability of a given TLD (top-level domain – com, net, org, etc).

Registering A Domain – The Basics

The actual process of registering a domain name is very simple, although you will need a credit card. There are a huge number of domain registration services on the Web, and there isn't very much difference between them in terms of quality of service. Apart from ensuring that they are actually a legitimate and accredited domain registration company, the main thing to look out for is price.

It may be handy to get your web hosting and domain name from the same company, and you may get a better deal by doing so – you need to be more careful about choosing your web hosting provider though. For the moment we'll just consider the registration process - see the next chapter for more information on hosting.

Here are a few well-known domain registration service providers:

Godaddy.com
Ipowerweb.com
Yahoo.com
Register365.com

There are many more, of course, so you can shop around to find the cheapest. You can register a domain for one year, two years, three years and perhaps more; the longer you register for, the better the deal is. If you're serious about your band, then I recommend registering your domain for at least two years. Watch out for special introductory offers – you can sometimes get a 'first-time registration' discount.

Note: It's not clear if the search engines take domain registration length into account when determining the trustworthiness of a website. If they don't at the moment, they may well do in the near future. Because people who create spammy websites don't intend to keep them for long, they tend to register the domains for one year. If you register yours for longer than the bare minimum, this might be one less flag raised with the search engines, and every little helps in this game.

My .Com is Gone – Should I Get A Different TLD?

If you find that 'mybandname.com' has already been taken, you need to decide whether to stick with your band name or try something different.

If you are a reasonably well-established band with a lot of loyal fans, you might prefer to keep your current name. In that case, you should try to get the .net top-level domain instead.

Even if you do get the dot com extension, you should also try to get the domain for your country of origin. For example, the .ie extension is for Ireland, and is highly trusted by the search engines because only someone with a genuine connection to Ireland is allowed to register one. The Norwegian TLD .no is similarly trusted. A .co.uk, .us, or .de will work nicely, although their registration policies are somewhat less restricted.

If you are a brand new band without any fanbase, and your dot com domain is taken, I would recommend coming up with a new band name. After all, you probably want to be as original as possible, and if the dot com is gone that means someone else thought of that phrase already (although it may not be in a musical context). Owning the dot com domain for your bandname is very important, so you should at least consider changing to a name you can be in pole position for.

Using The Internet For Bandname Research

If you can start with a clean slate, it makes sense to avoid creating competition for yourself. The Internet is a great research tool, particularly when it comes to finding out if someone else is using a phrase already.

To avoid potential legal problems later on, it's a good idea to ensure that there are no other bands already using your name. As is usual with the law, ignorance is no excuse: you can't just say you never heard of the other band before. The Irish band 'The Frames DC' were originally called simply 'The Frames', until another band called 'The Frames' threatened to sue them – so they added the DC and continued on their merry way.

Here's how to avoid a similar problem by making sure you're the original.

If you search for “my band name” in a search engine (with your actual band's name in place of “my band name”, but keeping the inverted commas), you will see a selection of pages from the Internet that contain that exact phrase. If no results come back, then you're probably safe.

If some results come back, but none are related to music, then you're probably okay too. However, it might be worthwhile making another couple of searches just to be on the safe side.

Try typing these into Google and Yahoo!:

“my band name” music
“my band name” album
“my band name” gig
“my band name” single

If none of the returned results indicate that a band is using your name already, then you're good to go.

Why Is DotCom So Important?

The .com extension is still seen by most people as the default for the Web. As such, dot com sites tend to get a lot of ‘type-in traffic’.

For example, when someone is looking for ‘bass strings’, they might type in ‘bassstrings.com’, even though they don’t know if such a site exists. It is also common for people to type searches into their URL bar – the browser will usually take them directly to the .com for the phrase they typed in.

For a band, you can probably see where this is going. If someone hears about you and wants to find out more, the first thing they will do is visit ‘yourbandname.com’. If this turns out to be a site about plumbing valves, your potential fan may be somewhat disillusioned.

Also, it’s easier to get someone to remember ‘yourbandname.com’ rather than some unusually formatted variant. It may be hard enough to get people to remember your band name in the first place – anything you can do to make it easier for fans (or clients) to find you is well worth the effort.

2. Free Or Not Too Free – The Web Hosting Question

OK, so you've realised that you need your own domain name - both to help people find you and to create a better first impression of your band.

Once you have a domain name, you need to decide where to put your website. The easiest option here is to direct your domain to some sort of profile page on a Music 2.0 site, such as MySpace, SoundClick or Last.fm.

Of course, the problem with the easiest option is that almost everyone is doing it, which doesn't really help you stand out.

Directing 'mybandname.com' to a MySpace page is not much better than having no domain name at all. Even a one-page website with a photo, a single paragraph describing your band and a link to a MySpace page is far better than sending your visitors directly to MySpace.

Why You Need Your Own Site – As Well As A MySpace Page!

You may be thinking, what does this guy have against MySpace? Well, nothing at all, actually. MySpace is a fantastic resource for musicians, as are many other social networking sites – I'll cover these in chapter six.

However, a MySpace page should not be the focus of your online presence – it should be supporting it.

There is a problem of control with profile pages – for example, MySpace could decide to shut down your profile tomorrow, and there's nothing you can do about it. Also, in terms of layout and content, you can only alter certain things. No matter how crazy your wallpaper is, it's still a MySpace page and there are limits to what you can do with it.

What you really should be doing is using MySpace to drive traffic to your site – not the other way around.

On your own site, you have complete control over what your visitors see, and what they can do. Even at the very basic level, having a site that isn't a social media profile sets you apart from the majority of bands, and indicates an extra degree of commitment.

Help - I Spent All Our Money On The Domain Name!

Although you can get full website hosting for as little as a dollar a month, many young bands don't have access to a credit card. If you can't afford to pay for web hosting yet, then there are a number of free alternatives that can still look professional.

1. Wordpress

You can host your site for free at wordpress.com. This doesn't mean that your site has to be a blog – Wordpress is very flexible, and is an ideal way to learn the basics of creating a website. Instead of creating blog posts, you can create static pages. You can set one of these as your homepage, and add other pages later on as required. Another great thing about Wordpress is the abundance of themes available – you can change the entire appearance of your site instantly, just by selecting a new theme.

2. Tumblr

Tumblr is even easier to set up than a Wordpress blog, although it doesn't have as much flexibility. It's sort of like a cross between a blog and a Twitter feed; if you want your site to be a source of updates for your fanbase, and not much else, then a Tumblr site might be right for you.

3. Ning

If you're feeling a bit more adventurous, you might try and create your own social networking site at Ning. This format is perfect for bands, and a great way of developing a community of fans. If you have a bit of experience with building blogs or other websites already, then perhaps you should have a go at developing a Ning site. Even if you're a beginner, you should be able to figure it out, as it's designed to be fairly intuitive. It is a fairly advanced option in terms of features – for example, Radiohead's new social networking site *Waste Central* is based on the Ning platform.

4. Weebly

Weebly is very easy to set up, and allows you to create a static-style site using a drag-and-drop template. It's almost as easy to use as Tumblr, but is probably more useful in terms of creating a navigable site with different sections for band bio, upcoming gigs, discography and so on. It doesn't have the flexibility of either Wordpress or Ning though.

5. Advertising-Supported Hosting

A number of web hosting providers do offer hosting for free – well, almost. Instead of paying them, you allow them to display advertising on your website. This is usually either a banner ad at the top of your pages or a sidebar featuring a selection of advertisements. The advantage of this option is that you have full control over your site (apart from the ads), you can learn the ropes of being a webmaster and develop your site exactly the way you want it. Then, when you have enough money, you can upgrade to a paid package and your site will be ad-free. The downside to this approach is that you have advertising plastered all over your site, which is not earning you anything (apart from ‘free’ hosting, that is). It may be worthwhile taking this option if the ads are not too obtrusive; after all, most websites do have advertising on them anyway, so a few ads may not disrupt your site too much.

These are just a few of the many options available to you at this stage; if you have a look around on the Web, you will find plenty more places to put your content online. However, I do recommend that you get your own hosting package at some stage.

Things To Look For When Choosing Your Hosting

You often get what you pay for in Web hosting; cheap price can mean cheap service – buy paying more doesn’t always guarantee you get the best either.

1. Reliability

You need a hosting plan that keeps you online; if your server is down on a regular basis, this will severely damage your website’s reputation with the search engines and will annoy fans trying to access your site. Check for some sort of uptime guarantee before you buy, and get feedback from anyone you know who already has hosting. A personal recommendation from experience is the best guide.

2. Server Location

The location of the server is also important. If you’re targeting an audience in the UK, then get a server that’s located in the UK. If you’re targeting a worldwide audience, a US-based server might be better.

3. Storage Space and Bandwidth (data transfer limits)

If you plan on offering music or video for download or streaming, then you’ll need a corresponding amount of storage space and monthly bandwidth.

For example, if you have ten videos on your site and they are each 10MB in size, you’ll need 100MB of storage space for them. If one person downloads all ten videos, that will cost you 100MB of bandwidth. If ten people download all your videos, that’s 1GB of bandwidth.

You can see from these examples that bandwidth can disappear very quickly indeed. It’s unlikely that you’ll have storage space issues, as very few sites are larger than 1GB, but it’s vital to ensure you have plenty of bandwidth headroom.

If you reach your bandwidth limit for a given month, your provider will either charge you extra for additional bandwidth or your site will automatically go offline. These are bad things. Avoid them by calculating your requirements in advance, if possible.

4. Databases

Make sure your hosting plan comes with up-to-date SQL/MySQL databases – you will need to use one of these if you are installing Wordpress, for example. Most plans these days do come with database functionality by default, but you should check for it anyway, particularly if the deal is very cheap.

5. Addon Domains

Some hosting plans allow you to host multiple websites on one package; these are referred to as addon domains or additional domains. This means you can register more domain names and host these new sites on your existing hosting. If you plan on creating more than one website, then you should ask about this feature.

3. Creating A Site On Your Own Hosting

Once you have a domain name and a hosting package, you can start creating your site.

There are many ways to create a website; if you want to do it the hard way, you can learn HTML and CSS, and code your site by hand in a text editor such as Notepad.

An easier (but expensive) way is to buy a professional Web site creation package such as Adobe Dreamweaver. This allows you to design Web pages using a drag-and-drop style graphical interface, and is much faster than hand-coding. This form of editing is known as WYSIWYG – what you see is what you get.

Alternatively, there are some free Web page editing programs out there that may be worth having a look at (these require basic knowledge of HTML):

[Evrsoft First Page 2000](#)

[HTML Kit](#)

Considering Wordpress

However, if you want to get yourself online without learning HTML from scratch or investing a lot of money in software, you should probably try Wordpress. As mentioned in the previous chapter, a Wordpress site doesn't have to be a blog.

Although many people have their Wordpress sites at Wordpress.com, you can also download the installer to create a site on your own hosting. This gives you total control over the look and feel of your site - or you can just find a template that suits your purposes and use that.

There are also a lot of plugins and widgets available for Wordpress. These are small programs you can integrate into your site to add functionality, and are generally very easy to get to grips with.

How To Install Wordpress

If your hosting package includes Fantastico, you might be able to install Wordpress automatically from cPanel, so you should check that first. When you log in to your hosting, look for a Fantastico or scripts icon, and see if it includes a Wordpress script.

If not, you need to visit Wordpress.org, download the latest version, unzip it and then upload the files to your server using an FTP client. Wordpress recommend using [Filezilla](#), although you can use any FTP client - a useful alternative is [Smart FTP](#).

I won't go into the details of installation here, as there is a [very clear guide to installation](#) on the Wordpress site. If you run into problems during the installation, the support forums on the site usually provide an answer.

Before you can set up Wordpress, you need to create a database that it can use. This is usually done from your hosting control panel, where you should see an icon or menu item for mySQL databases. You need to give this database a name, and create a user with all privileges. This means that you can read/write/execute any file. Make a note of the database name, user name and password that you created.

Potential Problems: Wp-Config File

The installation requires that you enter your database information in the wp-config.php file. Remember not to leave any spaces inside the apostrophes.

The database name and user name will have an underscore in the middle, so that they appear in this format: 'user1_mydatabase', 'user1_myusername'. Your actual information will be different, of course, but this is the structure you should follow.

Your password will be entered on its own, like this: 'password'.

Some people encounter problems connecting to the database when they run 'install.php'. If this is the case, the first thing to try is changing 'localhost' in the wp-config file.

Some hosting providers use a separate server for SQL databases, so if you have a look in your control panel you might be able to find out what that is. If you can't find it, you can always ask them. Once you have this info, you replace 'localhost' in the wp-config file with the correct server name, probably in this format: 'sqlserver17.myhostingpackage.com'.

If this doesn't solve your problem, then it's time to hit the forum.

Potential Problems: File Permissions

At this stage, you probably have Wordpress installed correctly, and it looks like everything is working fine. However, if you go to the 'Design' menu and enter the Theme Editor, you might find that Wordpress won't allow you to save any changes you make. This is because the Wordpress files are not writeable, so you need to change the file permissions to allow Wordpress to modify these files.

If you're using cPanel, you can just click on a file or folder and select 'permissions'. Here you can make the files writable; it's faster if you apply changes to all files and sub-folders.

This process is also referred to as CHMOD, which stands for *change mode*. The highest level of access is 777, which means that all actions are allowed on that file or folder. As always, you can find plenty of help on the Wordpress site if you run into difficulty setting file permissions for your blog.

4. An Introduction To Search Engine Optimisation

Before getting into SEO, you might ask: why do I need to optimise my site anyway? If I just go ahead and make a website, won't the search engines spider it automatically?

Well, perhaps - but there's a huge difference between being *indexed* (by the search engines) and being *found* (by your audience).

For example, when someone enters a phrase in a search engine, it's unlikely that they will go beyond the first page of results (by default, this means 10 organic results) - and only 8% of searchers make it as far as the third page of results.

This means that you really need to be in the top ten results for a phrase if you want to get a significant slice of its traffic. In fact, you really want to be in the top three results - position one typically gets around four times the clicks of position two, and the numbers decline sharply from there (see these AOL stats via [Jim Boykin's blog](#)).

It All Begins With Keywords

If you followed my band name research advice in Chapter 1, you may well have come up with a band name that is completely unique – for example, “*intercontinental rabbit silo discernment facilities*”.

If you set up a website, write a few posts about your new band and wait a while, you will probably end up ranking in position one for the search phrase “*intercontinental rabbit silo discernment facilities*”.

This is good, because it means that anyone looking for your band will be able to find you straight away.

Unfortunately, as you're just starting out, not many people are looking for you just yet. Your band name is not generating any traffic, which explains why there is no competition for your phrase. But at least you will be easy to find once things start gaining momentum (hopefully).

Choosing A Band Name – SEM Style

Here's an idea for tapping into a pre-existing traffic stream and giving your band's website a ready-made source of visitors.

If you don't really have any strong opinions about what your band should call itself, why not do a bit of keyword research and name yourself after a search term?

If your band name just happens to be a phrase that gets a steady stream of daily traffic, doesn't have too much competition and is somehow thematically related to the world of music, then you could regard yourself as being very lucky indeed.

Or... you could deliberately choose a band name that meets all these criteria.

Not very rock'n'roll, perhaps, but a lot of the stuff people search for every day makes for extremely interesting reading. Keywords can be surprisingly inspiring – many of the search engine queries I see every day would make much better band names than the old 'definite article plus plural noun' formula, for instance.

Alternatively, you could use this approach when naming albums or songs. If a traffic term catches your eye, why not take advantage of it?

One Page, One Phrase

As outlined above, you don't really need to optimise your site to rank for phrases that have no competition.

However, almost any phrase that has regular search traffic will have competing pages; the more searches a phrase has, the more competition it is likely to have, and the harder it will be to rank highly for.

Even moderately competitive terms require significant effort to achieve a good rank; this is why you need to optimise your site from the beginning, and develop it with care and attention. It's not a case of finding a list of keywords and trying to get your entire website to rank for all of them; what you need to do is optimise each individual page for a particular keyword.

By the way, if your band becomes popular, other sites will then begin to rank for your band name as they start writing about you. If your site is not properly optimised, you can easily lose your number one spot...another good reason to apply proper SEO practices even on low/no competition phrases, right from the beginning.

Xpand Your Structure Using Reason And Logic

How you structure your site and how you link between internal pages is important too, but for the moment the key point is this: optimising your entire site for a particular keyword doesn't necessarily make your entire site rank higher for that keyword. It may just mean that the search engines won't be sure which page is the most relevant to that keyword. The effectiveness of your targeted content can be diluted by poor information architecture.

Rand Fishkin of SEOmoz created a useful diagram that illustrates how search engine spiders (such as Googlebot or Yahoo! Slurp) figure out what each page on your site is about. If you have an internal linking structure that makes sense, and a correspondingly sensible arrangement of title tags on your pages, then the engines can clearly see [what's going on here](#).

Now, if you were going to only learn two things about SEO, it should probably be these:

1. the importance of title tags (*content is king!*)
2. the importance of anchor text (*links are the web's arteries and signposts*)

There is much more to learn, of course, but this is a good start.

Introductory Reading For The SEO Band

SEO is a remarkably dynamic sector - advanced techniques that are valid now may not be effective in three months' time. However, if you do the basics right and create a clearly defined website full of interesting content, you'll be on the right track no matter how the search engines' algorithms may change.

Here are a few recommended reads for those interested in learning a bit more about SEO...

[SEOmoz Beginner's Guide](#)

[Beginner's Checklist to Learning SEO](#)

[Aaron Wall's SEOBOOK](#)

[Dan Thies' SEO Fast Start](#)

5. Optimising Your Wordpress Site

Although continually improving, Wordpress is not particularly search-engine-friendly in its default configuration - there are a few SEO (search engine optimisation) tweaks you really need to apply *before* you start using it.

First of all, you should choose a theme that is reasonably well optimised already. You can find a selection of such themes over at [Courtney Tuttle](#).

Next, you should decide what your permalink structure will be.

Permalinks are ‘permanent links’ to pages and posts that you write, and they will be automatically generated according to your blog’s permalink settings (although you can edit permalinks individually before posting, either by using the permalink edit feature in Wordpress 2.5 or by creating a ‘post-slug’ in earlier versions).

However, regardless of what exact structure you choose, you should at least try to get some keywords into your permalinks. To view and modify your permalink settings, go to ‘Settings’, then ‘Permalinks’.

Why Are Keyword-Based Permalinks Important?

Having a keyword-rich URL is important for two main reasons: firstly, it helps users (and search engines) decide whether the page is relevant or not. Consider these two pages with the same content but different URLs:

- [mysite.com/how-to-optimise-a-blog](#)
- [mysite.com/cgi-bin/data/ex1/find/new/geturl.php?=Wsh2323nfiieelrs&?ID1](#)

If these two URLs were presented as search results, someone looking for information on blog optimisation will probably choose to visit the first URL, as it seems to be focused on the exact topic they wanted. By contrast, the second URL gives no clue as to the actual content of the page.

The second main reason for using keyword-rich URLs is this - when someone links to your page and uses the URL itself as the anchor text, then you get a link to your page containing your targeted phrase in the anchor text. This is quite important, as it is common for links to be posted simply as URLs, and anchor text is a vital part of how search engines figure out what content may be found on your page.

Select Your Categories Carefully

Before you begin posting content, you should have a good idea of what your site is about. If you have a band, then the blog will be about your band, but if you can incorporate some original content ideas into your site, you'll have a much better chance of standing out.

Your category titles should be terms with a fairly high search volume (preferably with not too much competition, but decent traffic is essential). They should also be relevant, descriptive and reasonably short. Each post you write within a particular category will serve to enhance the authority of that category.

The default permalink setting for a Wordpress blog is the numbered scheme.

```
"/blog/?p=123"
```

You should change this to one that at least includes the post title. Linkdisco uses only the post title, because I want to keep the URLs as short as possible, but a good alternative is to use the category base followed by the post title. To do this, choose custom permalink structure and enter "%category%/%postname%" in the box (without quotes).

SEO Plugins For Wordpress

Fortunately, there are many good SEO plugins that take a lot of the work out of optimising a Wordpress site.

It's vital that each page you write has a succinct, search-engine-friendly title and description. Your page/post title should always contain the keyword phrase you are targeting that page on. SEO plugins can create title and description meta-tags for you automatically, and also give you the option of customising various attributes of each post, if you want.

Here are a couple of popular and effective options:

- [Headspace - Wordpress SEO Pack](#)
- [All-in-One Wordpress SEO](#)

Another plugin you should consider is [Related Posts](#). As its name suggests, this displays a selection of links at the bottom of each post, leading to similar posts within your blog. This isn't so much an SEO tip as a usability and audience retention technique; the more you engage your audience, the more likely they are to return.

6. Get Yourself Connected – Link Building

As I mentioned in the chapter introducing SEO, the two most important things in website optimisation are:

- 1) content
- 2) links

If you create great content, with keyword-targeted titles, headings and copy that is well-written and informative/entertaining, then you are doing very well. However, how you link to this content, and how you get others to link to your content, is also extremely important.

Internal Linking

The links you put on your pages that lead to other pages on your site are known as internal links. These can be a powerful tool for instructing the search engines (and human visitors) which pages are most important, and telling them what content can be found on each page.

The links you use within your site should also guide your visitors to where you want them to go, and should help them find where they want to go.

External Linking

Links to your site from other sites may be referred to as external links, or inbound links. **Getting other sites to link to you is absolutely vital.** No matter how good your site is, you will never rank well for any valuable terms if you don't have a decent incoming link profile.

Weighing The Value Of Anchor Text

There are many ways of linking between Web pages, but the simplest is still the best – a plain old text link.

If some words on a Web page are blue and underlined, everybody knows that clicking on those words will take them to a new page – and the page will probably have something to do with the words they click on.

The words in a hyperlink like this are called 'anchor text', and the search engines use these to determine what a page is about.

If thousands of different websites link to a particular page using this anchor text - '[list of blogs](#)' – then the search engines will be fairly confident that the page contains a list of blogs. The algorithm will probably rank that page very high when someone searches for 'list of blogs'.

Every link in to your website is good; however, a link with targeted anchor text (containing a phrase you want to rank for) is more valuable than a link that simply says 'click here'. If a link using targeted anchor text comes from a site that is already trusted by the search engines, then you have struck link gold.

Be aware that the search engines regard a lot of inlinks featuring the exact same anchor text as a suspicious pattern, especially if they appear over a very short period of time. It's better to have variations of incoming anchor text (using synonyms, different word order etc), which is likely to happen anyway if you are attracting links naturally. Some webmasters use automated programs to generate incoming links - this is generally not advisable and can lead to sites being penalised by the search engines (they may even be excluded from the index altogether).

Ask Not What Links Can Do For You...

Search engines want the best, most relevant websites to appear on their results pages for any particular query. Trust is important here - the more trust you can establish with search engines, the easier it will be for your site to gain high rankings.

Building links is one way of doing this.

However, just as with keywords, not all links are created equal.

If a search engine finds two pages about 'bass strings', where one of them has ten links from external sites and the other has ten thousand, it's probable that the one with more links will rank higher.

However, if the ten links are all from websites that are highly trusted, and the ten thousand links are from link farms and generic free directories, then the site with the ten high-quality inlinks will probably rank higher.

So, to summarise, here's what you need to do, in ascending order of effectiveness:

- 1) Get links to your site.
- 2) Get links to your site using targeted (but varied) anchor text.
- 3) Get links to your site from trusted websites using targeted (but varied) anchor text.
- 4) Get links to your site from trusted websites that are topically related to your website using targeted (but varied) anchor text.

...What Can You Do For Your Links?

We have established that links to your website increase its ability to rank for keywords – particularly those keywords used in the incoming anchor text. But how can you get other websites to link to yours?

This is an essential question, and there are many answers. Some require more work than others, some are more effective than others. Let's have a look at a few to get started with.

- Profile Pages
- Personal Networking
- Forums
- Blog Comments
- Directory Submissions
- Articles
- Social Bookmarking

- Profile Pages

Over the past year there has been an explosion in the number of Music 2.0 sites on the Internet, such that it would be impossible to list them all here.

It is a good idea to create a profile for your band on as many of these sites as possible. This increases the chances of someone stumbling across your music, and many profiles allow you to create a link back to your main band website. Even if you do nothing else with these profiles, you should use them to increase your website's inbound link count – these are valuable links from relevant sites.

The first place you should go to create a profile page (if you don't already have one) is MySpace. After that, you should go and get a Last.fm profile.

Some music sites allow you to sell your songs as mp3 downloads too. While this sounds great at first, remember that people don't usually buy songs from bands they've never heard of. It's probably a better idea to develop an extended fanbase before you try to start monetising yourself.

Here's a list of 117 places to put your music online, courtesy of the Podcomplex Music Technology Blog.

Rocketsurgeon also attempted to create a somewhat larger directory of Music 2.0 sites here.

If you find yourself surfing the Internet aimlessly some day, you would do well to go through these lists and put a few more band profiles online.

- Personal Networking

This is probably the most important aspect of link building - after all, the Internet works very much like the real world. The more people you know, the more friends you have and the more industry contacts you make, the easier it will be to make progress.

For example, if you find a site that writes reviews of the type of music you make, why not send the editor a polite email to see if she would consider reviewing your band?

As long as you don't come across as pushy or arrogant, most people will be happy to provide some sort of feedback on your music. If you create a positive impression, they might even write something about you on their site, or give you a link.

There are lots of ways of making direct contact with webmasters; if done right, this can be a great way of building valuable relationships. If you can provide them with something in return, so much the better. If you think of webmasters as potential friends rather than just some faceless link-creating entity, you will probably meet with much more success (again, much like the real world).

- Find A Forum

Forums can be very useful resources – you can ask questions, join in discussions and make friends. When you join a forum, make sure to put a link to your website in your signature; this means that every time you post on the forum, you put a link to your site on the page.

If you provide useful comments, and help people solve problems, other forum users will probably check out your site. Don't just throw up random comments to get links though; make sure you provide valuable content and contribute in a positive way to the community.

- Comment on Blogs

This works in a similar way to forum participation; find some music blogs and comment on posts that you think are interesting. When you post a comment, there's usually a box where you can enter your website URL, so every comment you make can count as a link back to your site.

Most blogs use 'nofollow' tags on comment links, which means that search engines don't use these links to enhance the ranking of the destination site. However, such links can still be a useful source of traffic.

There are some blogs that don't use 'nofollow' – these are sometimes referred to as 'dofollow' blogs, and if you find one you like you should definitely become a regular commenter. Again, this is as much about participating in a community as it is a link building exercise.

- Directory Submissions

There is some debate over how effective directory submission is; it used to be very effective, but now only certain directories carry weight. However, submitting your site to a relevant category of a music directory will certainly do you no harm.

As a general rule, human-edited directories that require a submission fee are of more benefit than free directories. It may be a good idea to submit your site to reputable paid directories, such as Yahoo!, Best of The Web or JoeAnt.

In terms of free directories, you should certainly try to get a listing in DMOZ, although being accepted seems to be largely a matter of luck these days.

- Article Submissions

Submitting topical articles to article directories is another way of generating backlinks from relevant pages. If you write an article on the history of dub reggae, you can submit that article to a number of sites, such as ezinearticles or articlesbase. (Of course, this topic would be most appropriate if you actually have a dub reggae band yourself.) Your article will then appear on these sites, and you can include a link back to your site using anchor text of your choosing in the author bio box.

- Social Bookmarking

Social bookmarking is the process of adding a page to the index of a social media or Web 2.0 site such as Digg, Reddit, StumbleUpon or Facebook. This is a great way of getting links and visitors to your blog, and is an essential element of many linkbuilding campaigns.

There are more social bookmarking sites springing up every day, many of them targeted at niche audiences. You may find that the traffic from smaller niche sites is more targeted than the generic giants such as Digg. It's also easier to reach the home page of the smaller sites, so if you find one that's related to your music (or music in general) you should use it on a regular basis. One example of a music-only social bookmarking site is [Unreverse](#).

There are quite a few plugins that allow you to add social bookmarking functionality to your Wordpress site. You can select which sites you want to display buttons for in the settings menu of your bookmarking plugin. Here are a few examples of social bookmarking plugins for Wordpress:

- [Social Bookmarks](#)
- [Sociable](#)
- [Socialmarker](#)