

2

The Impact of MySpace on Music and Entertainment

Music industry insiders and watchers have definitely taken notice of MySpace's impact on music and entertainment. The old models of the music industry—record deal, mass radio play, major distribution—have been turned on their ears a bit. That's not to say that the standard business model is irrelevant. It's still vital in achieving mass-market penetration. But now there's a change in how musicians can get their songs heard. They're no longer solely reliant on radio as a means of reaching consumer ears, nor are they dependent on a record label for selling music. Instead, artists can market themselves directly to consumers, who in turn pass the word on to their friends. The web in general has made a direct-to-consumer approach possible for a long time now, but not until the proliferation of MySpace users who love music was there a ready-made community just sitting there waiting to hear the next big music star.

In this chapter we'll take a brief look at how MySpace has affected the landscape of the entertainment industry.

In the Beginning...

The generally accepted story of MySpace's founding is that two guys from California, Tom Anderson and Chris DeWolfe, created the site in 2003 along with a small group of programmers. It may have started as a new way to keep people in the know about local Los Angeles bands and club gigs, but it grew into a place to meet new friends and keep in touch with old. Artists of all stripes, including poets and filmmakers and especially bands, flocked to the site, and it got a reputation as an indie music portal. There are some who dispute this story and the founders' accounts, including Brad Greenspan, former head of parent

company Intermix, who claims to be the real founder of MySpace on his website: www.freemyspace.com.

Nevertheless, it's hard to believe that a few short years ago, MySpace was just a fledgling creation. In 2005, only two years after its founding, Rupert Murdoch's News Corporation bought Intermix for a whopping \$580 million. More than \$300 million of that is said to be for the MySpace properties alone, which easily draw in the coveted 16 to 34 demographic.

The Evolution

Today, nearly 200 million users later, MySpace can brag about its desirability. Every time you visit the home page MySpace.com, you'll see another major label, movie studio, or TV network advertising its latest project or launching its newest product (see Figure 2.1). And we're not just talking banner ads, either (although MySpace has no shortage of those). Entertainment heavyweights look to MySpace to showcase fabulous customized profiles that fit the label, studio, or network's branding like a well-programmed glove (see Figure 2.2).

Those of you who aren't on MySpace yet may wonder why the industry sees it as an essential marketing venue. Why not just use a regular website, as people have been doing for years? It's not enough anymore. With MySpace, your audience is built in. Millions of people are going to the homepage to log in and check their email and peruse their friends' profiles anyway. Each and every one of them will see a homepage promotion, and they'll click and find more than just some static advertisement. They may find select video clips, contests, posts from artists and actors themselves, music, giveaways, free videos, and downloads. They're interacting with the product in a quicker way than by visiting a website. Not only will you see a movie's or an artist's official website address on a trailer, ad, or CD, but more and more lately you'll see the MySpace address too.

Matt Crossey, creative director for Working Class Records in the UK, sums up the beauty of a MySpace profile like this: "People's attention spans are so minute. [MySpace] is bite-sized—a brief summary for most people is all they need."

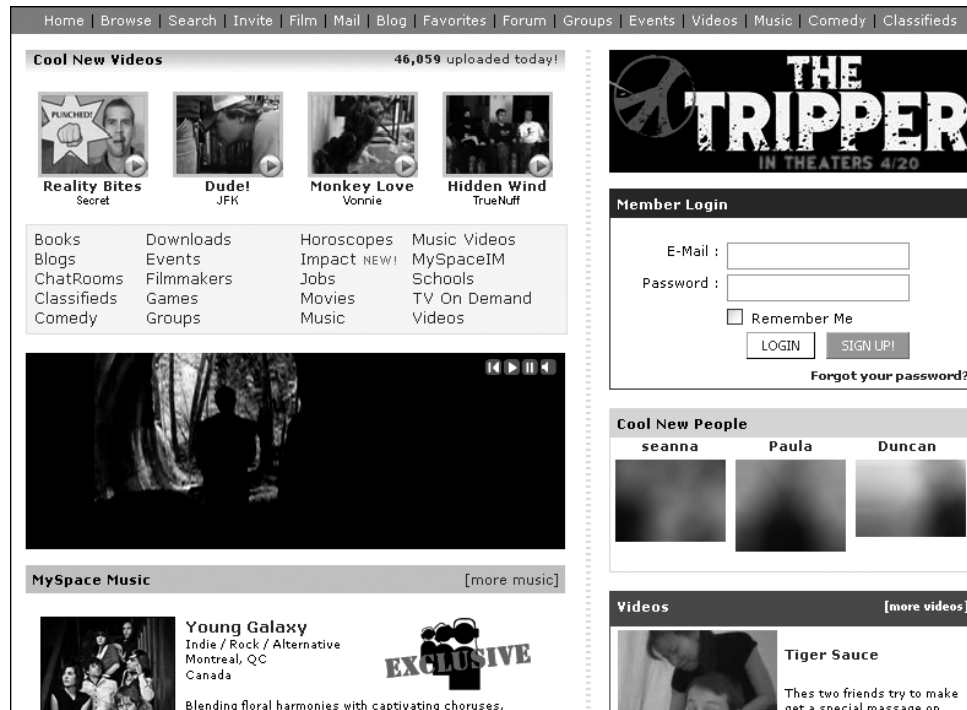


Figure 2.1

This portion of the MySpace homepage shows links to movie websites and featured band profiles.



Figure 2.2

This MySpace profile for the movie *Transformers* is a great snapshot of the movie and its brand.

12 MySpace for Musicians

You may not be promoting your music on the homepage like major record labels and movie studios do, but you are still a MySpacer with music to market. The same mentality about it applies. I, too, find myself seeking out artists' MySpace pages more than their websites now. I eventually get over to the website, but sometimes I find the profile much nicer to deal with. It all loads on one page, including music clips, and that's that. If I want a few extras, I hop over to the official website, and once in a while I sign up for the official mailing list. But when I want to check quickly for tour dates or news, I click on the artist's profile. You'll find this is true of many MySpacers. Do a web search on your favorite artists, and you're likely to see their MySpace page pop up pretty close to the top of the search results.

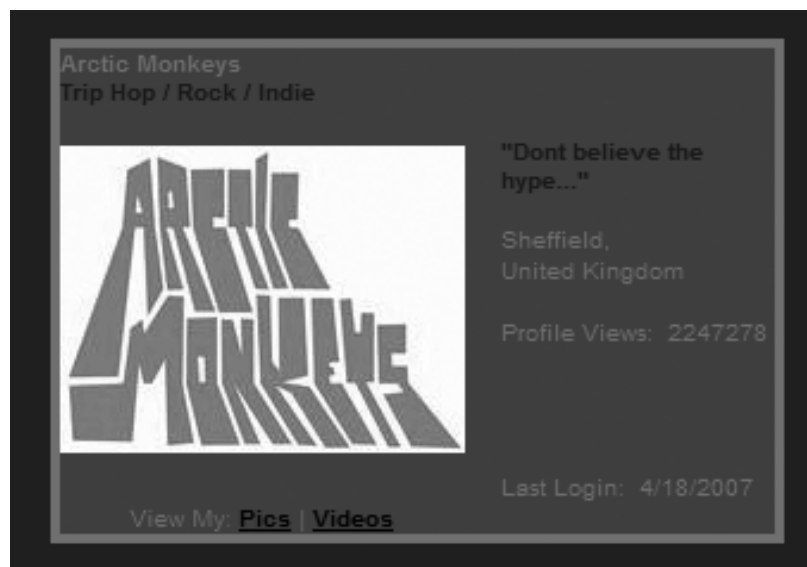
Don't think you don't need an official website, your own dot-com. You *do*. The key is to marry the two and realize that they are used differently. Remember that old saying about putting all your eggs in one basket? MySpace is hot now, but who's to say it will stay that way forever? What if they start charging for access? What if another site usurps its popularity and users jump ship? If all you've got is a MySpace profile and nothing else, you're in trouble. Use MySpace to build your own marketing list by getting people over to your website too. You're not just building a profile or a site—you're building relationships with your customers and fans.

How to Be Successful

The number of artists who were discovered through MySpace is growing all the time. From the Hollywood Undead (see Figure 2.3)—a bunch of teenagers who a couple of years ago recorded some songs on their computer, posted them on their profile, and ended up with a massive following and a record deal with Interscope—to the tale of the Arctic Monkeys (see Figure 2.4)—a UK band promoted by fans on MySpace and beloved by the underground way before they were ever offered a record deal—the list goes on, and there isn't enough room to recount all their stories.

**Figure 2.3**

A few short years ago, the Hollywood Undead were just kids in masks with a MySpace profile.

**Figure 2.4**

The Arctic Monkeys' profile headline ironically declares, "Don't believe the hype..."

14 MySpace for Musicians

It's true that people are finding their own way more and more, circumventing the initial need for label support, developing their own images, recording and manufacturing their own albums, and even selling them to customers without a distributor. But let's be honest with ourselves. Stories like that of the Hollywood Undead, the Arctic Monkeys, and others like them are not going to happen for everyone. MySpace, for all its positive attributes, is not a panacea for artists. You should, however, take note of how important and required it has become in the normal course of industry marketing. "If someone didn't have a MySpace page, I'd think they weren't very cleaned up," states Crossey. "The novelty is past. Now it's part of the standard marketing portfolio."

Internet aficionados and recording execs alike do indeed see MySpace as a standard marketing element now. Even consumers are surprised if their favorite major label artists don't have profiles. Unless it's part of your anti-marketing plan, sort of thumbing your nose to all things commercial, Crossey noted, you have to have one if you want to be taken seriously.

Marketing companies are popping up all over the web, swearing that they can inflate the number of hits your profile receives, making you more desirable to labels. One even claims that a record label won't look at you unless you've got at least 75,000 hits on your profile, meaning that many people have visited your page. But is that true? Does the number of hits, friends, or music plays you have determine your appeal to a label? "No. If it's a low number of people [who have accessed your profile], then that's brilliant. I would be excited because I'd think I'd discovered you early," says Crossey. "Record labels are competing over the same artists once they get big."

Crossey also doesn't take notice of the number of music plays because the player usually starts automatically when you visit an artist page. Therefore, it's not a true indicator of the song's popularity. As for friends, the numbers are not that important unless you have 50,000 friends or more, which is an intriguing amount.

It may surprise you that Crossey looks for the kind of traffic you get on your main artist website, not on your MySpace profile. This is where your analytics come in: How many hits is your website getting

daily and monthly? How many visitors lingered there, and for how long? And how many migrated from your website over to your MySpace profile and vice versa? These factors, along with the quality of your music, the professionalism of your demo, and your photos (are they artsy and “glossy” looking?), are what labels look at more and more. Very few record companies want to spend much time or invest much money developing an artist nowadays.

Over the past couple of years, MySpace has not only been a music portal, but it has become a record label itself (www.myspace.com/myspacerecords) (see Figure 2.5). Culling talent from among its members, MySpace Records’ distribution is through Universal Music Group’s Fontana Distribution and its marketing is through Universal’s Interscope Records. MySpace also now offers all of the community’s artists a built-in record store to sell downloads through a partnership with SNOCAP, a digital licensing and copyright services company.

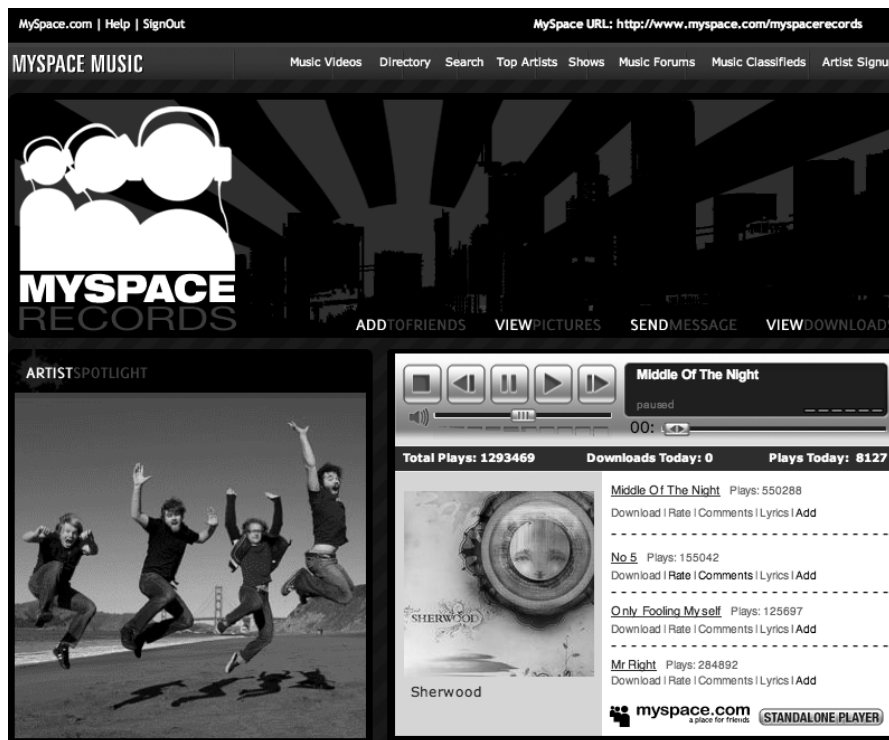


Figure 2.5

MySpace Records finds talent among the MySpace ranks.

16 MySpace for Musicians

No matter where you are headed in your career, MySpace is really useful for getting exposure and creating hype. Your profile is like a little online press kit. It's much easier for people to take in who you are and what you're about by visiting that one page. You want to sell records and get people to shows, of course, but you have to get into their consciousness first, which is why you bought this book in the first place.

Crossey continues, "Before MySpace, people would always have a mailing list. But now, if a band has buzz, with MySpace the buzz can get around much faster."

In addition to connecting you with fans, MySpace is bringing artists and businesspeople together as well. Many find it essential for networking with other musicians, booking agents, and the like.

It's time to get started. First, let's decide what type of MySpace account is for you. Chapter 3 will take you through the kinds of accounts and who should use them.