



A Musician's Guide To Choosing The Perfect Publicist

By Ariel Hyatt

Ariel Publicity Artist Relations & Cyber PR

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Dear Reader,

Thanks for taking the time to read this guide to choosing a publicist. I wrote this to help you navigate the ever-expanding world of music PR and offerings in the market place, and to help you avoid many of the costly pitfalls my clients have fallen into before they worked with my company. I just got a call last night from a veteran musician who did his homework and avoided hiring one firm with a horrible reputation only to get all of his money taken by another publicist whose phone was disconnected the day after the check cleared.

I'm not saying this is commonplace in my industry. There are countless wonderful publicists working hard as you read this, and I have designed this guide as a service to you so that you can choose the perfect publicist that is just right for you and your team. I totally understand that we were not born with the innate knowledge of what PR is or how it differs from advertising and other types of promotion you may be looking into (in fact, my first day as an intern at a fancy public relations firm, I asked my supervisor, what is PR exactly? He looked at me like I had ten heads and said, PR is well, it's PR! - okay, glad we got that straight, I thought to myself).

So, thanks for reading this and happy hunting.

All My Best,

Ariel

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About The Author...

Ariel Hyatt

Ariel Hyatt is the president of Ariel Publicity, which was founded 11 years ago and is located in New York City.

My mission and vision is that all artists deserve to be heard and there is a place for artists of every level to receive exposure. I have placed tens of thousands of artists in countless outlets from national magazines and TV to the most grassroots online fanzines.

The publicity game has changed radically over the last few years, and at Ariel Publicity we are committed to delivering results and opportunities to artists seeking exposure.

Ariel Publicity
Specialists in Getting Maximum Exposure for Artists Online
(212) 239-8384

Six Major Benefits Of Hiring A Great Publicist

There are a lot of good reasons for hiring a wonderful publicist to add to your team. I use “she” a lot when referring to publicists because a vast majority are women, no offense to the men in my field.

1. A publicist can make you look great on paper with a fabulous bio written by a professional. She can also strategize and create a story about you that you may have never thought up.
2. She can help you hone your pitch so you can sell yourself whenever you are talking to anyone.
3. She will increase your name awareness.
4. If you are a touring artist, she can get you tour press in all the local markets you are scheduled to play.
5. She can get you legitimate press quotes to add to your arsenal, which you can then show your potential team when hiring a radio promoter, retail rep, manager, label, and distribution company. You can also add these quotes to your website and to your press kit.
6. She will save you a ton of work by leveraging her contacts and relationships.

Five Common Misconceptions About Publicists & Publicity Campaigns

Here are some common misconceptions about publicists and publicity campaigns in general.

Misconception Number One:

She sounded really together and ambitious on the telephone, she is amazing!

Sometimes yes and sometimes no, a publicist’s job is to sell on the telephone and many of them will naturally do a great job of selling themselves to you.

Unfortunately, there are a few publicists that have reputations for not delivering great work (or even one single report) after they take your money. So it is critical that you do your research. Please read the article on that located right here in this guide.

Misconception Number Two:

By hiring a publicist she can create magical opportunities!

Nope. She can’t work miracles, but she can introduce to the media and help you once you have a defined strategy and a roadmap. Hiring a publicist is just the beginning of your work. You need to keep her busy with stories and angles and events to work throughout her time managing your campaign. A publicist is only as

good as whatever she is publicizing, and it is critical to give her as much arsenal to use as possible.

Misconception Number Three:

She works for a huge band, she knows all these people, she will get me in Rolling Stone!

NO! Publicists should absolutely be hired for who they know, other clients they represent, and their relationships at national publications are critical, but be warned: larger bands with big followings and scaleable sales numbers get articles over smaller, up and coming artists a lot of the time. If you are an emerging artist you sometimes need to build up to the larger publications.

This does not mean that the publicist should not try to get you placement, she should. Just know that even the tightest personal relationships don't equal articles. Of course, the publicist knows these people and can always ask but it is absolutely not a guarantee that you're going to get articles written about you.

So you must always strategize about what your angle is before you get into it. And of course national PR is possible for all artists at all levels, but it must be appropriately handled. An artist with no national distribution and minimal sales is not likely to end up on the pages of Rolling Stone, Spin, or Blender, unless there is a fabulous story around the band that needs to be told to an international audience.

Misconception Number Four:

I'm gonna be on late night TV!

Late night television shows such as Conan O'Brien do showcase independent artists from time to time. This is true but not all publicists have the connections to get you on these TV shows. In order to avoid a major letdown discuss this with your publicist *before* you hire her. You can ask: Have you ever placed anyone on late night TV? And: How many artists have played and on which shows? She will be honest both in her ability to reach the bookers and about what chances she thinks you may have to actually end up on a show like Conan.

Misconception Number Five:

If I hire a publicist, hundreds of articles will be written about me!

Nope. It is critical to manage your own expectations. I'm not saying aim low but for the media as an artist, you must not only have a very compelling story (and of course great music) for anyone to write about you but you must also have a reason for coverage. Just having an album release or a couple of local shows is not actually grounds for national coverage and many larger publications may pass you up the first campaign around. That's OK--this should be considered a building block and not a rejection. Of course playing the numbers does help. So the more appropriate journalists your publicist reaches out to and sends your music to, the better the chances of placements.

Nine Critical Things You Should Know About Publicity Before You Make Your First Move

I talk to musicians all day who call looking to hire a publicist, and I've noticed that many artists don't really understand what publicity is. And why should you? We are NOT born with this knowledge--and Lord knows I have NO idea how to play an instrument.

1. The Definition Of Publicity - First, we are going to start out with the very basics--some definitions of what publicity is exactly. According to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary:

Publicity - "An act or device designed to attract public interest; specifically: information with news value issued as a means of gaining public attention or support. Also: The dissemination of information or promotional material."

I couldn't have said it better myself. Publicity is EXACTLY these things.

A music publicist is hired as a member of your team to represent you to the media. Media is defined traditionally as editors and writers at newspapers, magazines, college journals, and television. Some publicists may also cover radio for interviews on tour stops, but if you want to get on the radio charts (like CMJ), you will need a radio promoter. Some publicists also cover Internet PR, like my company, but not all traditional publicists do.

A publicist's job is to liaise with the press. They are not hired to get you a booking agent or gig, a label deal, a distribution deal, or any other type of marketing deal. That is what a manager is for. A well-connected publicist may be able to hook you up with all of the abovementioned things, but it is not in her job description.

2. You Are In The Driver's Seat - Remember artist - you are the buyer here and you are shopping for PR. You are in the driver's seat. It's your money and your music that keep publicists in business. Hiring a publicist is like hiring another guitar player for your band. Choose one that you like who fits your vision and your goals. All too many times I've heard that a publicist was hired in spite of the artist's personal opinions. You should like your publicist, and she should be the right one for you.

3. With Publicity, You Pay For Effort - Never For Results - I have had disgruntled artists call me and say, "I hired a publicist and I only got six articles. That cost me \$1,000 per article!" Okay. This is not how you quantify a PR campaign. How you quantify a PR campaign is by how many albums

were sent out, what the responses were, and even if they were inconclusive or negative. It's how much effort the publicist made on your behalf. Of course, you should get some and many results. Getting nothing is totally unacceptable. But you never know where your publicist's efforts will show up months, and sometimes years, after your campaign is complete.

4. A PR Campaign Needs To Be Planned Well In Advance - For long-lead press (that means magazines with national distribution like Spin, Rolling Stone and Paste), the editors put their publications to bed three full months before they hit the newsstands. So if your CD is coming out in October, you must have it pressed with full artwork and ready with materials to mail in July. Of course not all PR campaigns focus on national press, but no publicist will take you on with zero lead-time so you definitely need to prepare lead-time in every case.

Recommended Publicity Campaign Lead Times:

National Campaign: 3-4 months before the release

Tour Press Campaign: 4-6 weeks before the show

Local Campaign: 4-6 weeks before placement

Online Campaign: 2-3 weeks before placement

(Placement = article, CD review, calendar listing, TV or radio interview, etc.)

5. The Four Components Of A Press Kit - A good press kit consists of four parts: the bio; the photo; the articles, quotes, and CD reviews; and the CD.

* **The Bio** - Create a one-page bio that is succinct and interesting to read. I strongly advise hiring a bio writer (This should cost between \$200 - \$400). If you are not ready to pony up the cash, enlist an outside source to help you out. I find people who are great story tellers make great bio writers.

* **The Photo** - It can seem cheesy to arrange a photo shoot, but if you take this part seriously you will deeply benefit. Create a photo that is clear, light, and attention grabbing. Showing movement is a plus (sitting on a couch or up against a brick wall is not interesting). If you have a friend who knows how to use PhotoShop, enroll him to help you do some funky & fun editing.

* **The Articles, Quotes & CD Reviews** - Getting that first article written about you can feel daunting. Two great places to start are your local hometown papers (barring you don't live in NYC or Los Angeles), and any music website that you like.

* **The CD** - The CD artwork, like the press kit, must be well thought out. Do not bother sending out advance burns of your CD unless the writer requests

them. Full artwork is always preferred. Put your phone number and contact info in the CD so if it gets separated from the press kit, the writer knows how to contact you.

6. Publicity Is A Marathon, Not A Sprint - PR is very different in nature from a radio campaign that has a specific ad date and a chart that you are paying to try to get listed on. There is no top 40 publicity chart. With the sheer number of albums coming out into the marketplace (approx 1,000 per week), it could take months longer than your publicity campaign runs to see results.

7. Online Publicity Is Just As Important As Offline Publicity - I always say that today's newspaper is tomorrow's recycling, so don't discount online publicity so quickly. For one, it's up and around for months and sometimes for years. The new research and statistics prove that people are reading newspapers less and less with every passing day. People are getting their news from the Internet, so Internet placements are absolutely wonderful and totally legit.

8. Publicity Does Not Sell Records - If you are hiring a publicist to see a spike in your CD sales, I have news for you. There is absolutely no correlation between getting great PR and selling records. PR is designed to raise awareness of you in the press, to help build a story, and also build up critical acclaim. And of course, a great article can lead to sales and being on NPR could really help you see a spike in sales. But overall, if selling albums is your goal, PR is not the only thing you will need to reach it.

9. All Publicity is Good Publicity - I know we have all heard this, but it's a great thing to really understand. If one of your goals in PR is to get your name out there (and this should be a goal), the truth is the average person remembers very little of what they read. Only a tiny percentage gets retained, so if you really think that readers are going to remember a tepid or a mediocre review of your CD, the answer my dear friend is they won't. And never ever take your own PR seriously. As my favorite artist Andy Warhol once said, "Don't read your press, weigh it."

Making Initial Contact: The Three Questions To First Ask Any Publicist

I get a lot of complaints from artists who call me and say that they have tried to get certain PR firms on the telephone and that they never get a call back or that they had trouble getting them to respond at all. Speaking in defense of a busy PR firm, many of them are just too crazed with work to handle the incoming inquiries. With a little finessing you can get to them. This is not a guarantee that they will want to take you on as a client but it will at least get you in the door.

Here is a simple 3-step system that will get you in the door at a busy PR firm, after you have done your research and decided which PR firms you would like to target.

But first, a note of precaution & a check sheet...

Most major PR firms (the ones that have national acts on their rosters) have strict criteria for accepting clients and many of them plan campaigns months in advance. So here is a check sheet of what you need to have in place before the big firms will be interested:

1. National brick and mortar distribution – CD Baby may not be enough of a distribution plan for some larger PR firms who deal with national publications (please tell me the last time you read: “Available at CD Baby” in Rolling Stone?)

I’m not saying you need to have national traditional distribution because I personally don’t think it’s a great idea for most artists at this point. I’m just letting you know what PR firms sometimes require.

2. A release date that is at LEAST 3-4 months away from your initial contact (preferably 5-6 months)

3. A tour in place or some kind of local or interesting angles to discuss

STEP 1: Pick Up The Phone *

*Never wimpily email a request to hire a PR firm, it makes you look unprofessional. I purposely don’t even have my email address on my website because bands fire “How Much” e-mails at me all day!

When you make initial contact with a public relations firm, **don't** just dive in and start firing questions at whoever answers the telephone. Note that a very busy intern or an administrative assistant may be in charge of answering the phones and that intern will NOT be able to tell you prices or PR firm availability, so know who you are taking to and know who to ask for.

TIP: Visit the “about us” section of the PR firm’s website and read the NAMES of the people working at the firm so you know who you may be either speaking to or asking for! And always ask for someone specific by name.

STEP 2: If You Are Asked To Leave A Message

Don't take it to mean anything personally - I can't tell you how busy a PR firm with a large roster of clients can be.

You will be put into voicemail or someone will take a message.
DO NOT just leave your name and phone number!!

Leave a full and concise message saying the following:

Your name - first and last, and your band name if applicable
Your telephone number - just ONE number not work, home and cell.
Your reason for calling - "I am interested in hiring a PR firm and I am inquiring about your availability."

If the person asks you for more detail then give it, but don't volunteer your website, your release date and all of those details. That is what the conversation with the appropriate person is for. If no one calls you back within 72 hours, call again and repeat. Three strikes and move on... If a PR firm can't call you back after 3 tries they are not the firm for you.

STEP 2: If You Get The Publicist On The Phone

It is highly probable that the publicist you want to speak to is under deadlines for the day, and you must respect that she has a job to do. So when you do get someone on the phone on first contact, ask only three questions.

But, first introduce yourself very briefly:

Hi, this is _____ and I'm in a rock band from Los Angeles about to release our new album.

1. Are you considering new clients for the time frame of _____ (your release date)?
2. Give a very brief synopsis of your project, three sentences max. Include:
 - The genre of music you play
 - Proposed release date
 - Distribution plan. It's fine if the album is only digitally distributed or only available through CD Baby, but make sure you tell her that and know this may not be appropriate for her firm.
 - Your tour schedule with markets and highlights.
 - Then any other parts of your release plan, like your radio promotion, your retail promotions, your street teams that will be in place, etc.
3. The third question to ask is: Can I send you my music on CD or links to my MySpace tracks and set up a time to follow up?

That's it!

Is She Really That Good? Five Research Tips To Help You Find Out

Tons of publicists can sound really together and ambitious on the telephone, and she *should*. This is her JOB.

But, sadly, there are quite a few publicists that are known for not delivering great work or for being accountable to their clients after you pay them your hard-earned money. So it is critical that you do some due diligence and research.

There are four ways we suggest that you research publicity firms.

1. Google / Yahoo Search - the individual names of each publicist, and the name of the company, and look for information about these individuals.
2. Google / Yahoo Search - the different bands and artists that the PR firm represents in Google news search <http://news.google.com> and check out where the placements (articles and stories) have happened. If you don't see a lot of articles on the artists this may not be a great sign.
3. The CD Baby message boards. <http://cdbaby.org/> There is a lot of information about different publicists on the CD Baby boards and clients from these PR firms have talked a lot about their experiences. You can also post and ask for feedback here.
4. Call the publicists' past clients, management, labels, and artists, and ask them what their experiences were.
5. Sign up for the music thoughts list at <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/musicthoughts> and ask your peers. There are thousands of musicians on this list and they could really help you get some great insights before you spend your money.

How To Avoid Five Costly PR Billing Rip Offs

When you go to hire a publicist and she quotes you a price that number usually represents the monthly retainer price. What I want you to be aware that on top of that monthly retainer there will be expenses and you should always ask a simple question to avoid a surprise invoice after your first month onboard with your PR firm.

The simple question is:

What do you bill for on top of your monthly retainer?

Here are the 5 common things that a PR firm will bill you for and some advice on how to save some money. I have worked with over 1,000 artists in the past 11 years and many of them have negotiated expenses before the campaign started. It is your right to do so.

#1 Telephone

A publicist's main tool is the telephone, and the truth is business landlines don't come cheap. A way of avoiding surprises is simply asking what is the average monthly charge for telephone bill? This is usually the same approximate number every month and she'll know it and quote you accordingly.

#2 Postage - Regular Mail, FedEx, & Messenger Services

Mail costs money - this we know, but ask your publicist if she charges a handling fee on top of regular first class postage (many do because they rent postage meters and pay fees for envelope stuffing, then there is the cost of the labels, meter tape and ink, I know it sounds a little crazy but until you own a postage meter I can't stress enough that the bloody thing is expensive to maintain!)

☺ Money Saving Tip #1: Buy stamps, stuff your own envelopes, and mail your own initial mailer!

This could save you hundreds of dollars if the PR firm is doing a large mailer on your behalf (over 100 envelopes). Invite your friends over, crack open a bottle of vino and stuff away.

FedEx also costs money and sometimes a writer is on a deadline and needs a CD the next day.

☺ Money Saving Tip #2: Be very weary that your publicist could be FedExing, using "FedEx First," which costs \$5 - \$15 more to get it there first thing in the morning. So always have a conversation about what type of FedEx she uses and request "standard delivery" if that is possible. Messenger services are a necessity and sometimes need to be used. Always ask what the charges are just so you are not surprised (it's approximately \$9 to deliver a small envelope in midtown Manhattan).

#3 Copies, Paper & Envelopes

If your publicist is putting a press kit together for you, chances are she will be using paper and a copier. Ask how much she charges per page she copies.

☺ Money Saving Tip #3: Make the copies yourself at a local copy shop if it costs considerably less than your publicist charges. Drop them by her office by when she needs them, though you must respect her need to do her job with good lead-time. Padded envelopes are also very costly. So if it will save you a good amount of money, buy the envelopes and do the mailer yourself! Staples is NOT a great place to buy cheap padded mailers. For that, go here: <http://www.uline.com>

#4 Burrelles Clipping Service

Burrelles is a service that all major PR firms use. Their job is to monitor every newspaper and magazine in the country (as well as radio and websites and TV transcriptions), and when your name or your band's name shows up they clip it out and mail the physical copy to your PR firm. It's a wonderful service to have, and back in the day before you could find a lot of content online, it was the only real way to monitor the success your publicist was having, but it is VERY expensive. Your publicist pays a high monthly retainer for it (approx. \$500) plus approx. \$2 per page per clip. This means if you are mentioned on the cover of the entertainment section of the newspaper, then there is a photo and lead in page and then an article on a 3rd page, this can cost you \$8. In addition, that one article could be syndicated to many outlets and you will pay for copies of the same article (sometimes up to 20 or more).

Now with the Internet, it is not always necessary to have Burrelles. But any top notch PR firm will have it and they will charge you for it.

☺ Money Saving Tip #4: OK, this one won't get you the amount of articles that Burrelles will track because they RULE but you can opt out of Burrelles at your PR firm and sign up for Google Alerts <http://www.google.com/alerts> and have Google track the articles that get placed yourself. You won't get the physical copies of each placement but if you see an article you really love and need to have, you can always call the subscriptions dept. of each newspaper and order a copy for a few bucks.

#5 Gig Expenses - Transportation & Beverages

If your publicist and PR team come out and see you play a gig, they could easily bill you for their travel expenses such as cab or subway fare, or gas mileage. And if she brings a music writer to check you out, you could very well be buying that writer drinks at the bar.

So there you have it--the top 5 most frequent visitors on all of my clients' invoices.

☺ Money Saving Tip #5: Set A Pre-Negotiated Expenses Budget

You can say: I only want to spend \$400 or \$500 (or whatever number is comfortable for you) per month on expenses and ask your publicist to suggest ways to keep the number at this budget. So that way you will be completely prepared.

THANKS!

Thank you for taking the time to read this guide! I hope it was educational and informative and you now know a lot more about how to choose a publicist.

I always welcome feedback, so please feel free to contact me at ariel@arielpublicity.com,

Or drop me a line at:

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Links:

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Ariel Publicity Testimonials

“Everyone needs an Ariel!”

-Derek Sivers, CD Baby

"The music business is a place where, more often than not, work ethic and reliability are nice ideas. It is challenging enough to get the word out and heighten awareness of your music without having to deal with people who make empty promises. That being said, Ariel is honestly one of the only people I have met in the music business who does what she says she is going to do. She is a monumental resource to the independent musician."

- Coby Brown, The Coby Brown Group

"We've seen our web presence grow remarkably with weekly requests from Internet radio stations and on-line mags... Ariel and her people tailored our campaign so we were targeting the appropriate circles. Being cared for this way took a huge amount of stress off a very challenging process. Our web presence has grown tremendously and it's all been paperless. This is a truly great campaign strategy."

- Bryan Manzo, Pleasurecraft

"Ariel got us more press in 2 weeks as an indie artist w/ no record deal than (another unnamed major PR firm) got for us when we were signed to a major in all of 2003."

- Scott Sax, Feel

"My experience with Ariel's Cyber PR has been very positive. They really take the time to get it is what you are doing and find the appropriate places to get your music out there. My record is not the easiest sell as it is instrumental music but they did a great job of getting it out there to Internet radio and made nice presence online about the project. Ariel has a clear vision of where the music industry is headed. Highly recommended."

- Aaron Comess, The Spin Doctors

**"For the first time, I'm spending my efforts sending our album out only to people who are asking for it. Since signing on with Ariel, requests by fans to join our mailing list have increased, I'm getting requests to do radio interviews, and have even been getting requests for signed photographs."
- Robert Szeles, Kiss The Girl**

"I have been extremely happy working with Cyber PR and even more with the results. I found the reports to be extremely informative and the excitement from the staff to be perfect. From day one they were a part of the team and that is pretty hard to come by these days."
- Jennifer DaRe, ATN Management, The Hanks

**"The results of Ariel's publicity work were almost immediate. The reviews started pouring in from all over the country, but especially from the places to which we were traveling, such that we saw a marked increase in the number of people attending our shows...It makes no sense for a band to try to travel and grow without an Ariel Publicity working the channels. We won't leave home without her."
- Graham Guest, Moses Guest**

"Ariel and the team are definitely a true pleasure to work with. It's the perfect next step for any indie artists looking to get their music out there.
We're so glad to have found her!"
- Elizabeth Ziman, Elizabeth and the Catapult

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