

A Hot Live Show + Good Camera Work = A Killer Promo Video

Booking a live show is a huge opportunity for up and coming artists to showcase their talent. Everyone has heard the incredible stories of a unknown artist being discovered by a major record label in some small club where they were performing. The media hypes these stories with a blitz of press that you can't help but notice. This hype fuels the dreams of many artists seeking music stardom.

The reality is a great majority of *independent artists* do not end up with record deals period. The truth is the music industry doesn't want you or your music until you can start your own buzz. It doesn't matter how good your music is. If they don't know about you they don't want you.

The dream factories like 'American Idol' are a long shot for an artist to get discovered. Having an A & R person from a major record label end up at the live show and offering you a deal is another long shot.

You're probably thinking, "Hey I thought this was going to be about taping my live show", we will be getting into that later in this article. I just wanted to set the stage for how important a marketing tool a promotional video is to an artist. *I'm an independent filmmaker* that has shot live at shows in dive bars to upscale venues. Great rush!

Thousands and thousands of unsolicited CD's are sent off to record labels by hungry artists every month. They range from the submissions that are labeled by hand that always end up in the trash to the more well packaged CD's that include artwork or maybe a press kit.

An awesome way to make your CD submission stand out and get noticed is to include some footage of you performing live. I guarantee it will make you more appealing to record labels as an artist. Music videos are a different animal all together, but in this article I want to focus on sharing with you how to shoot a promotional video for next to nothing.

Maximize the opportunity you have to perform at a venue in front of a live audience to the absolute fullest by taping your performance. A performance lasts for one night, while a promotional video of you crushing your set lasts a lot longer.

Regardless if you're the opening act or headliner you're taking the stage to rock the show. You know you're the next big thing. Unfortunately, many talented artists do not have major music labels or sizable marketing budgets behind them when they start to have a professional camera crew tape their show and capture behind the scenes interviews.

I taped live shows for a music management company. Sometimes I had a camera crew of four, but most of the time it was only me as a one man camera crew. I learned a lot and saw a lot covering these shows at clubs all over [Southern California](#) .

Some artists make the mistake of having a friend or family member tape the show on any camcorder with nothing more than the infamous words, 'just point and shoot' as guidance. The performance captured is often grainy, out of focus, or you get dizzy from the zooms in and out.

You've just lost a powerful marketing tool when you didn't have to. Be clear in what you want. It's easier then ever to tape a show for next to nothing that looks good. I avoided getting into specific video equipment, software, and other non-essentials. This is all about the shoot. Now let's get to it.

Tip #1: Plan. Planning the shoot yourself doesn't cost anything but some footwork and energy. Who cares more about your career than you? Let whoever is running the show know you're going to have your performance taped. This will keep your camera crew from being hassled, be it one person or more. Know the layout of the venue and get there early. Be realistic. If you have one person behind a camera do not expect them to be everywhere at once. Work with within your resources. The most important images to capture are of you on stage in the moment. Let your camera crew know how long you're going to be in the spotlight. Nothing worse than running low on tape

or battery power.

Whoever you have running the camera won't be a professional, but that doesn't mean you can't plan like one. Hand out a simple shot sheet telling them what you want. If you want tight mostly close-ups of yourself or wider shots with all the performers on stage let them know. They might not be able to get all of it, but they won't waste tape on useless footage either.

Be positive that whoever is taping your show knows how to work the camera. We've all heard someone ask, 'What button do I push to record'. I would have them practice. It might seem stupid, but doing a walk through rehearsal of your show with them taping it will be a big help. You can shoot it in your living room, garage, or backyard. The key is to act like it's the stage and let your natural movements come out. It's like a director does when he has actors walk through a scene so he can plan where the camera needs to be. It's called blocking. Anything can happen in the moments on stage, but your camera crew will be ready to roll with you because you've planned.

Things are going to be very chaotic at the show. You will be focused on doing what you need to do and that's performing. If you take the time before the shoot to plan as much as possible will payoff huge when it's show time.

Tip #2: Two is better than one. Hustle to get a second camera for the shoot. Go online and look for college kids advertising themselves as videographers or filmmakers in your area. Visit the local colleges and post flyers. Sell them on how hot the show is going to be, the beautiful people, etc. Be straight away that you can't pay them. But would they rather be at home or out taping a rising music force? They need the experience and resume filler, you need the extra camera.

If you find someone always provide them the videotape, \$20 for gas, and your deepest thanks. Sometimes believe it or not your friends or family will bail on you. This backup camera person might be all you have to cover the show. If they agree early enough make sure you get them your shot sheet and outline of what you want just in case they do end up covering your ass. I worked for free in college sometimes when a show was supposed to be hot. Those were good times I had. No money, but I saw some amazing shows and mixed with some very cool people. Sell them on that.

If you come up short finding someone you don't know to work for free, hit up everyone you know to lend you their camera, hopefully with them as a human tripod. I was doing a show hip hop show at the Santa Monica Pier and the crowd was going to be huge. I begged a friend to come with and bring her camera. She stood in the middle of the crowd with her camera and didn't move. She was my human tripod. I was able to move around more and get better shots because I knew she had the master of the show pretty well covered if I got in a pinch.

Tip #3: One person and their camera. If you only land one person to tape your show don't trip. When the first lyric or sound from your performance explodes from the stage have the camera far back enough to capture you or the entire group. No matter if you're all over the stage you will always be in frame and on camera. This will also allow the crowd to be taped in the foreground filling the frame with energy.

Make sure the camera is above the crowd. Not towering over the crowd, but enough where the performers on stage are clearly visible. Each venue is different, that's why during your planning stage take a look at what your up against. Will you need a small step ladder? Will a chair work? Use this master shot to get a majority of your footage.

One thing I like to do is start back in this master then walk in to a closer shot mid-way from the stage, not zoom, walk. You captured the entire shows vibe from the back now you're moving in to make it more intimate. You don't need to get fancy here. You have to be steady.

I was working a show alone covering the background musicians. The headlining artist had their own three person camera crew. They were all over the place and looked real professional laying on their backs, crouching, and striking all kinds of camera crew poses. I followed my master back and walk in formula. After the show these guys clowned me pretty hard about the way I taped the show.

They asked me if I got this, did I get that. One described in detail how he started on an extreme close-up of the guitar player's pick while he was playing then zoomed out. A camera crew at a bar after a show always talks about the footage they got. I listened and actually felt I did a bad job covering the show compared to what these guys did.

Later I get a call from the music management company praising me on the footage I got. Apparently the other guys wanted to direct a music video and it showed in the footage they taped. All their trick shots and gimmicks were mostly unusable. The artist's record label actually used most of the footage I shot that night for a promotional video. I was just there to cover the background musicians, but luckily my simple formula captured the whole show.

That's what you want to do. Capture your whole show. Trust me a mostly master shot won't get boring at all. The key is to use this footage later as a promotional video of you as an artist. It's not meant to be some slick MTV style music video with quick cuts and crazy shots.

Tip #4: Forget in camera effects. Avoid using any in camera effects. You will be stuck with them and can't remove them from the footage if they look bad. I would stick with shooting the show in the normal camera setting. Let the performance and venue speak for itself. Plus the in camera effects will make it look like a total home video.

Later on if you feel the need to add effects do it with some over the counter editing software.

Tip #5: Do not use zoom or whips. Start off by putting tape on the zoom button or control so it can't be used. Nothing viewers hate more than dizzying zooms. How often have you watched a home movie where people went zoom happy? I for one can't watch videos like that. Think of the reaction you will get when you send out your promotional video to a record label or to anyone you're contacting to further your music career.

If you want to move into a closer shot always slowly walk in to the subject. If the crowd makes it hard to do this cut the camera off and fight your way to the spot you need to be. Don't sweat turning the camera off. The footage you got would have been useless shots of the ceiling, floor, and body parts of the crowd. When you're in the best spot you can get fire up that camera and shoot away.

Don't whip the camera to some action on the stage then whip to something crazy that happens in the crowd. The footage will be all over the place and have less impact. The fight in the crowd might be pretty cool, but are you there to get footage of an artist performing or taping a reality video? Stay focused. You can follow the action and adjust. Just make sure every move you make has a reason and is not over done.

The bottom line is to shoot in the performance in blocks. Get a master of the over all performance with closer still shots mixed in. Watch other promotional videos or the news and you'll see it's a series of locked down shots.

Tip #6: Wear headphones: Almost everyone has headphones already. If not they are inexpensive to buy. It's a must that you plug them into the camera when the show is being taped. The audio you capture when shooting a live show will not always be pristine, but it helps to know what audio you are getting.

Stay with using the camera's built in audio mic. You do not need to make the audio set up more complicated at this stage by adding an external mic or plugging into the venue's sound system. I can't stress it enough stick with the camera's built in mic for all your audio needs related to the show including behind the scenes interviews. People say whenever you can use an external mic and avoid the built in camera mic. For your situation of shooting a promotional video for next to nothing you'll be fine with the in camera mic.

If you get distortion or the audio is too loud where you're taping at you'll know by wearing the headphones. Then you can adjust and move your filming position. I am not an audio expert or sound mixer. I use common sense and my ear to gauge the audio of the video I'm shooting. It seems to work.

Tip #7: Keep the camera steady. If you can absolutely buy or borrow a tripod for the camera you will be using. Shaky camera work will take away from the performance on tape. Nothing is better than footage that is well framed and steady. The beauty of a tripod is you can set your shot, lock off, and let the camera roll. A good rule of thumb is to hold shots for at least 20 seconds before moving the camera angle.

If you can't get a tripod lean against something to support yourself if possible. You can also lock your elbows close to your body with your eye firmly in the viewfinder to reduce camera shake. I have on more than one occasion been forced to turn myself into a human tripod. It beats the heck out holding the camera with one hand.

Tip #8: Dealing with stage lighting. I've never met stage lighting that I liked as a camera operator. In fact you will hate it. Mostly because you're the only one that will be concerned with the lighting. Everyone else in the place will give two shakes about your lighting issues.

It doesn't hurt to ask the lighting person to turn up the lights a little for the performance. Low moody light is good for the live crowd watching, but bad for your video.

I was taping a rap artist at a small club in Los Angeles. The house lights were turned down to almost nothing and the stage was lit with a few lights. I asked the lights be turned up a little and was told no. Another time the artist requested that the lights be turned up slightly while they performed and "presto" they made it happen. An artist always carries more weight than a grunt camera operator.

I will avoid going into a technical rant about gain levels etc. But I'm figuring if you're having a non-professional or fairly inexperienced person tape your show that will only add to confusion. I want to keep it to the basics that anyone can handle to improve the quality of footage being taped of the the show. If you have a more camera savvy person taping they will already know the deal on gain etc.

It's not a bad idea to buy a light for the camera. You get these at major electronic retailers for as cheap as \$20. They can even be used off the camera in some situations. I was in a jam once near center stage and had to cradle the camera while sticking the light closer to the artist with my free hand. They're small size makes them great on the move. These small lights won't give you a huge light boost, but it will help.

If you can use the Auto-Exposure this is a great time to do it. Outdoors camera's adjust much better to lighting. Indoors you need to adjust to the lighting you're dealing with. This goes back to planning stage. If you were able to practice using the camera Auto-Focus will not be intimidating to you. Low light means you will have to open the eye of the camera up as much as possible. This should get you through.

Tip #9: Be low key. The crowd is unavoidable at shows. They will cross your in front of your camera when you're taping. They'll look into the camera and all the things we've seen people do when they know a camera is present. Try to be as low key as possible. Be the fly on the wall. You do not want the artists on stage or crowd distracted by you.

This is where it's to your advantage to not have a full blown professional camera crew coming into the venue like a bull in a china shop. People become keenly aware of cameras and act differently. You want the footage to be as natural as possible.

Start by turning off the red light on the camera when you hit record. Cover it with tape if you need to. I have found at live shows the light is distracting to those around you. Earlier I talked about getting a light for the camera. The same thing applies here. If you do not need to turn on the light don't.

When people see that camera light they cover their faces and other things. They're doing everything but acting natural when they see the light. Pick and choose the spots where your camera light needs to be used.

Tip #10: Always get a backstage interview. As soon as your done with your show take time to give an interview backstage to your camera person. You'll be pumped up and that will comes across on the video. You might even be able to get other artists to talk about your performance giving you more credibility, especially if they have a name already.

A real interview away from the phony studio setting or well rehearsed interview by some news person is much more interesting. Here you are fresh from performing backstage at some venue speaking with emotion about your music. You have to be your number one salesman.

The editing of the footage is something else all together. With the information I've shared you will have better footage to work with in post-production. One last tip I can give is that if you do not have access to editing software

to cut your footage into a promotional video look for college students or people looking to break into editing. Sometime they will do it for frre to have something to show and build their resume. Could be good for both of you. Best with everything.

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