Fan Etiquette: Are The People Who Love Your Music Ruining Your Band's Reputa...

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By Sheena Metal

They're generous, they're consistent, they're giving...and most of all...they love your music. They're your fans and they come to every one of your live shows, fork out money for cover charges, CDs and t-shirts, bring your band gifts, throw you house parties, and spread the word of your music on the internet and beyond. Your fans are the single most important ingredient to the success of your band. Without them, you'd be rocking out in your Aunt's basement to an audience of none...well, maybe her cat.

But there can be a dark side to the hoards of happy humans drunk on your future #1 hits. Sometimes the folks barreling in to see you play, or flooding your websites with their online presence are causing more harm than good to the reputation of your band. Rude behavior, message board flaming, compulsive sticker-ing and flyer-ing, may all seem like helping to your flock of followers but to club owners, industry and those newly interested in your music, they may seem like trouble-makers, belligerents and vandals.

It may be simply a case of over-exuberant fan zeal. Your fans think they're preaching the gospel of your band to anyone with eyes and ears: by dropping your postcards all over town like a bird with irritable bowel syndrome, by filling up strangers email in-boxes with bulky MP3s and HTML photo-heavy notices about how much you rock, and by yelling your band's name at the top of their lungs during another band's set like a parrot with Turret's Syndrome. These unsolicited over-promotions...albeit well-intentioned...are hard for the average person to separate from your band's own promotional efforts and may not be appreciated in the way they were intended. On the other hand, it may be that your fans are so revved up by the love of your music that they've become arrogant, aggressive and just plain out of control in any arena (or cyber place) your band inhabits. At any rate, you may find that you need to dial these folks back a bit to create a environment that is fan-friendly without comprising your band's opportunities.

The following are a few tips that will help you to guide your supporters in their quest to be adamant fans without allowing them to turn into an obnoxious, rowdy, gang of rabid baboons.

1.) Communicate With Your Fans---A lot of problems can be eliminated by simply setting up a line of communication between your band members and your fans. For instance, if you know that a particular club forbids setting around flyers, postcards or other promo materials, post it on your website with the upcoming show info-blast. Set guidelines for your band and for each individual show and let your fans know that they need to follow these simple rules or they're no longer permitted to attend live gigs and to post on your cyber message boards. A little information can go a long way and your fans will be happy that you let them know what they can and can't do at any particular show.

2.) Learn From Experience---Sad but true, often the best way to learn what's not appropriate at shows is for

inappropriate things to happen. When fans begin their overblown behaviors, benign-intentioned or not, you will learn by the reaction of the clubs, the industry and your other fans what's okay and what's not going to fly. A good example is this...placing bumper stickers on club walls may be encouraged at some places but forbidden at others. The first time you get a call from a red-faced bar owner screeching through clenched teeth that his men's room walls have to be repainted, you'll know that it's time to email your fan base and let them know to leave their reserve of band stickers at home when the band plays that club again. In another example, it may not occur to your band that certain fans are behaving rudely to club personnel or to your other fans, at your shows, until someone makes you aware of it. At that time, you may need to email your naughty fans and let them know that certain bad attitudes are unacceptable at shows, and on your message boards, and that fans who can't be pleasant will not be invited back.

3.) Friends And Family Are No Exception---As awful as it sounds, often times a band's family and friends are the most out of control and obnoxious at shows...and on the web. Maybe it's because they're more emotionally invested in the band and its members, or maybe because the musicians forget to remind their loved one about fan etiquette. You and your bandmates may think it's a given, but some of the biggest jerks, idiots, and rebel rousers at gigs are your loved ones. It doesn't matter it's the bass player's ten year-old brother to the drummer's 60 year-old dad, you don't want to be banned from your favorite showcase venue because granny kicked the bouncer in the shin. Don't be afraid to sit your friends/family down and spell out the live show/internet rules for your band. Sometimes you can't control the fans you don't know, which makes it all the more important than ever to control the fans you do.

4.) Lay Down The Law---Once you become aware of the "problem" fans, it's time to explain to them what they can and cannot do at your gigs and on your website. Before banning anyone from visiting the band's shows and sites, try sending out a polite, but firm, email with some specific guidelines and a serious warning that the next step will be cutting these bad elements out of the band's loop. It's important to try not to make the email too harsh, as it may insight further acting up. So, just deliver the message in a casual way, explaining that their actions are hurting and not helping the band...a fact that they honestly may not realize. Honestly, you may need to give it some backbone so that your jerky fans really understand that their jig is up. If you're having trouble with someone you know well...a particular friend or family member...a phone call or face-to-face meeting might better do the trick. No matter how the message is executed, it's important to let your fans know that certain behaviors will not be tolerated by the band under any circumstance. Most fans would rather shape up that be cut out of all of the fun, and the band's reputation will be safe from troublesome followers for the time being.

It's true that fans are a band's biggest asset. But left uncontrolled they can also be the biggest liability as your band takes on the responsibility and reputation for the antics that its fans pull at live shows and on websites. Like crazed leprechauns, full of mischief, each fan's silly stunts and nasty attitude problems will eat away at your band's good name with tiny bites...like a school of piranha in a stream eating a full sized goat down to the bone in seconds...until your band is left, a former shell of itself, wandering your town trying to figure out why you can't get booked and no one visits your website. It's not a good sign when you see a tumbleweed blow through your music career. Nip it in the bud now. Control your fans behavior. Trust me; you'll be glad you did.

Sheena Metal is a radio host, producer, promoter, music supervisor, consultant, columnist, journalist and musician. Her syndicated radio program, Music Highway Radio, airs on over 2,400 affiliates to more than 126 million listeners. Her musicians' assistance program, Music Highway, boasts over 10,000 members. She currently promotes numerous live shows weekly in the Los Angeles Area, where she resides. For more info:

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