

Press Kit Fundamentals

As an artist or band, you're going to be repeatedly forced to explain yourself. And you are not going to go very far if you are unable to use words to communicate who you are, what you sound like, your mission statement, and why someone should care about you. In short, you're going to need a press kit that includes a well-crafted artist bio.

The most important thing to remember is that your artist bio is neither a rambling autobiography, nor the introduction to your future memoirs: A band bio is a professional sales tool that is part of your press package. But as an emerging DIY artist, you might not be able to afford to pay a professional writer, so you could end up writing your own artist bio.

When you sit down to write about yourself and your music, you need to know that your bio is just a small part of your "big picture" marketing strategy. Your marketing strategy must communicate what you have to offer to your fans, and you need to show your value in terms they can understand.

If you want to be taken seriously as an artist, you have to have promotional material. And your band bio is a critical component of your press kit. Your bio represents your first opportunity to spark interest in someone who will be a champion for your music.

The following are some tips for writing a riveting bio that will make people want embrace you and your music.

Clearly define your mission statement.

Before you even think about writing a bio, you have to have a firm grasp of your story and of what your music sounds like. This concise description of your music and who you are as an artist or band should not exceed a couple sentences; in fact, some of the most effective band mission statements are phrases of about 5-10 words.

Think about your mission statement the same way you'd think about an "elevator pitch" in the business world (and as a serious artist, your career is a business!). How you would describe your band if you got into an elevator with someone who asked, "What's your band like?" or "What kind of music do you play?" and had only a few-floors' ride to explain yourself.

If you don't already have a mission statement, and the prospect of summing yourself up briefly terrifies you, think about what your devoted fans might say about your music. Who do you sound like? Which qualities set you apart from other bands within your genre? You can even enlist the help of your fans with a fun survey via email that asks them to describe you and what your music means to them.

Because the best band bios highlight a band's individuality in a language that speaks directly to fans and potential fans, having a mission statement that provides an unobscured view into what others say about you and the music you create can effectively speak to those that read your bio.

If you use this statement as a powerful intro, you'll have a better chance of captivating others and propelling them into the subsequent sentences and paragraphs.

Skip birth and childhood.

Unless you are currently a child prodigy, if the "history" / "experience" section of your bio starts with "I was born ..." and goes on to include, "Then I played 'Earthquake McGoon' in the Louis Pasteur Elementary School production of Lil' Abner ..." you must regroup. Even if you believe to your core

that your music career was launched when you played a singing tomato in your first-grade class' play about the food groups, stick to relaying experience that directly relates to your current band / solo project and the type of music you play.

Additionally, if you are in the process of writing your bio and find yourself having to type some version of the sentence, "Unfortunately, the band split due to artistic differences, and she left to pursue other projects" one or more times, you should probably backtrack and edit yourself.

Another major sign of an amateur-circuit band bio is that it contains a series of mini bios that relay each band member's age, influences, years of experience, former bands, etc. Make sure your audience knows the names and key roles of each of your band members and stop there. You're not trying to sell your band on the talents of pieces of the whole.

Highlight personal stories and anecdotes.

While your band bio does need to be professional, it also needs to tell an interesting story. If you look at a random sample of band and artist bios on Facebook, you'll notice that most of them are dull, predictable and follow a standard formula. They will likely include the following statements in some form: "The Nantucket Muthers will rock you as you have never been rocked before;" "Candy Kandy has loved to sing from a very young age;" "The members of Bobbi Kennedy and the Politicians met in high school and have been playing together ever since." (Fake band names have been created to protect thousands of guilty parties, and apologies to any real persons accidentally named.)

Musically-inclined people meet and end up playing together all the time, so if that is the most revolutionary event in your band's saga, you need to realize that it's already been played out thousands of times. Most band "meet cutes" are not very interesting to anyone outside the band, and most "how he/she got started" artist stories would sound exactly the same devoid of personal, unique and potentially funny details.

Start your bio with your mission statement – your opportunity to tell your audience what to expect and enrapture them enough to get them to keep reading – and then make sure all the particulars that follow about your history and playing experience could not belong to anyone but you. There are a lot of talented, hard-working musicians out there; thus, without traces of your inimitable personality, your musical aptitude and your many years of study and practice alone are not necessarily going to make for an extraordinary narrative.

Use your long-form bio sparingly.

Your long-form (long) bio is best kept to no more than 750 words. (And it really should be about 500 words.) Your short-form (short) bio should be about 250 words. As a rule of thumb, your short bio is just your long bio stripped of a detailed history, focusing heavily on your mission statement and current projects like recently-released music, collaborations, etc. When you're determining where to use each bio on your website, social media pages, and in your press and promotional materials, keep in mind that people in general have very short attention spans.

You should definitely include both your short and your long bio (in different but inter-linked places) on your official website. But most of the time, your short bio will suffice for your social media pages and even when you're sending out music and information to the press (especially unsolicited). Those who want more from you will ask, and then you can send them the long bio. Plus, one of the purposes of your Facebook page and other social medial pages is to redirect fans to your website, where they will be able to read the finer points about you and your music, merchandise, etc.

Plan to update all your bios often.

When you are an active, engaged artist, your story is dynamic and always unfolding. Your band bio is a way to inform others what is happening now. Thus, you need to keep your short and long bios up to date. If you experience a big milestone – if you land a big show, get management, book a tour, sign on with a label or celebrate, any other major success – you need to revise your bio immediately. However, you should be revisiting your bio at least once per month, even if all that happened to you was that everyone showed up to rehearsal on time and none of you got the swine flu that was going around. A well-crafted bio is a forward-looking document that reflects where you are now and your plans for the immediate future. If you don't update it frequently, others will think you've become inactive.

Above all, your band bio must have a positive tone, be straightforward, enlightening, and filled with positive comments – and even second-party quotes — about you. The narrative has to be interesting enough to get the reader to not just listen to your music, but take action and a vested interest in your success.