

Trading Places: What You Need To Know About International Trade Shows

This is a brief overview on how to get the best out of performing at a music industry trade conference such as South by Southwest in Austin, Texas, CMJ in New York, or BIGSOUND in Australia. **By Alan Holt.**

A trade show or trade conference is a gathering of music industry professionals and artists for the purpose of creating networks, developing new and existing business relationships and discovering new talent.

Before you go ahead and start planning, the most important thing you need to do is to define what you want to get out of a trade show. This will inform how you approach the event.

Different conferences service different needs. The most popular for New Zealanders are:

BIGSOUND, Brisbane, Australia
www.bigsound.org.au

AWME (Australasian World Music Expo), Melbourne, Australia
www.awme.com.au

The Great Escape, Brighton, UK (festival-style showcase for new music)
www.greatescapefestival.com

South by Southwest, Austin, Texas, USA
sxsw.com

CMJ, New York, USA
www.cmj.com

Reeperbahn, Hamburg, Germany
www.reeperbahnfestival.com

MIDEM, Cannes, France (for music industry professionals only)
www.midem.com

Standing out from the Crowd

Last year 1900 bands performed at SXSW, 1400 at CMJ and more than 400 at The Great Escape. For this reason it is important to stand out from the pack as much as you can. You can do this through online self-promotion, hiring professional promotions companies,

and performing as many shows as you can while you are there. Obviously it is also advantageous to get on bills with more popular bands. This is not often easy.

Showcasing & Parties

The majority of trade fairs give you one official showcase. At AWME, The Great Escape, SXSW and CMJ the New Zealand Music Commission's Outward Sound office will often put on an additional event. At CMJ and SXSW there are also unofficial and official parties during the week. It is in your interest to perform as many times during these events as you can. Research the parties that took place the previous year as it is likely that the same parties will occur again the following year. Contact the party organisers as soon as possible regarding your possible inclusion in their event.

If you have an agent or international label already they should also be helping to find you additional shows.

Promotion

There are many types of promotional companies that you can hire. How much promotion you do and what type is dependent on what you want and your budget.

If you are more interested in raising your profile amongst labels, publishers, music supervisors etc you may want to concentrate on focusing on US online and social media promotion, for example.

Promotion in the USA can take many forms and the cost of it can range from \$500 USD to sky's-the-limit. Different promotion companies have different areas they specialise in, ie. a press and radio focus, retail, club culture, or an internet/social networking focus or any combination thereof. The New Zealand Music Commission deal with a variety of companies and can recommend a few if

you are interested.

However you decide to promote yourself it is important to create your own Music 2.0 toolkit. See page 22 for tips on what to include in the perfect Electronic Press Kit (EPK). For a trade show, where you'll potentially be included on lists of bands to check out, you'll need some subtle adjustments.

Bios:

You will need three different bios:

1. A one or two sentence bio that evokes what you are about. Many websites or guides will need this and they won't have time to go through your page long bio and edit something together themselves. Starting with "Formed in Hamilton in 2009..." isn't going to cut it. You really want to hook them in those first 30 characters and make them want to read more about you.
2. One paragraph bio. A good quote from some sort of media or known authority is good to include.
3. Full page bio and EPK.

All versions need to have easily accessed text that can be cut and pasted. Word documents are better than PDFs as sometimes PDFs are problematic.

Social media:

When you are at your trade show make sure you update Twitter and Facebook multiple times a day. Share your experiences. Discuss new bands you have seen. Discuss concluded and upcoming performances.

Soundcloud has become one of the go-to music hosting sites. When music blogs first appeared people posted mp3s. They now embed Soundcloud players. If you want your music to be promoted on blogs then you need a Soundcloud page. At the moment Youtube is the most important website

in the world for music. This is where most people go to listen to music. It's often the first place they look to hear a particular song. You need to create a Youtube channel. If you do not have music videos (or if you do and they are not current) it is absolutely legitimate to upload a song to the site that either is just a still image, a series of still images or some sort of evocative but simple video. Potential labels, agents and the like will want to know what you are like live prior to seeing you at events like SXSW so its essential to also include live performance videos.

Bandcamp is one of the best places to put your music in order to sell it or give away in exchange for email addresses, or send private streams to media. See page 14 for more options on how to sell music and merch online.

What you can do yourself:

1) Promote your music through music blogs. See page 22 for a selection of international music blogs that can help start a buzz. The music blog aggregator The Hype Machine www.hypem.com is

also a great way to find blogs that might champion your sound. Start visiting those sites and begin making comments on their posts. Basically make friends with them. Once you have contributed a few times to their blogs introduce yourself and your music and ask them if they would be interested in posting one of your songs. If it's an influential or favourite blog, offer them an exclusive on a new track.

2) Reach out to other bands of a similar nature to yours who are attending. They may be intrigued with a band from NZ and may want to help you out with gigs, information or other opportunities. In the future you may want to visit their town and they may want to visit yours.

3) Contact people/labels/publishers you wish to connect with before you get there. Do not be overbearing or pushy. Be friendly and keep your initial emails brief but informative. Don't send files, send links instead.

4) Contact party organisers for more performance opportunities.

Performing

When you perform, announce the name of your band at least three times. At the beginning, the middle and the end of your set. Play your best songs in the middle as people will arrive late and some may leave early to get to their next commitment.

If you commit to performing at a gig make sure that you do it and you do it on time. Do not start or finish late. The former is frowned upon - especially if you arrive late - the latter is a sin beyond all measure.

Bring merchandise to sell and give away. Bring business cards.

Recommended Reading:

Get More Fans by Jesse Cannon & Todd Thomas. www.getmorefansbook.com
This is an excellent and detailed guide to managing your band in a music 2.0 world.

For more info on applying for trade shows contact the Outward Sound office: international@nzmusic.org.nz