



First Aid for Your Press Kit

Your artist has killer songs and keeps audiences spellbound. You want to generate a media buzz. How can you keep your press kit from landing in a journalist's circular file?

Bio: Fast, Factual and Full of Flavor

What is an artist bio?

Although bio is short for "biography," you're not telling your act's entire life story. Its primary purpose is to interest readers in the artist's music and spin his story for public consumption. It's a branding tool. But it should also serve as an introduction that answers certain basic questions: Who is this band? What do they sound like? Where do they come from? What have they accomplished so far? Why the hell should I care about them?

An artist bio should read like an informative, entertaining feature. If it succeeds, journalists will use it as a template for their articles. That's why the bio should tell them what they need to know without requiring further research. It's hard to believe, but some bios omit such vital statistics as album titles, release dates and who plays what. Don't raise more questions than you answer.

Hype: not your friend

Don't come on like a huckster. Indulging in hype will fatally impugn your credibility and get your press kit tossed immediately. "Artist X is the most exciting rapper on the scene today and is causing a huge buzz throughout the industry" – this kind of claim will get you nowhere. News flash: Music journalists know who is and is not causing a buzz.

You may quote me

Memorable soundbites from your artist are often the best way to present both the person and his music (after all, it's what the artist – not the bio writer – has to say that's important). You don't have to quote

him verbatim. In fact, you should clean him up, edit him down and otherwise refine him, which you can do without losing his essential voice. It ain't journalism; it's PR. Artists usually appreciate a little help in the quote department.

Sound off on your sound

Although your artist may hate to describe his music, it must be done. Party-rocking hip-hop? Amp-melting death metal? Intimate acoustic songs blending Leonard Cohen and Verdi? You need a descriptive hook. Think of it as an advertising tag line, another branding tool. There's nothing wrong with citing influences.

The story so far

Include details about local airplay and press; tours, festival appearances and opening spots for established bands; film, TV and/or game placement; and other quantifiable achievements. If the story of how the band members met is a good one, tell it. If not, find another angle. What stories do you find yourself telling most often about the artist?

The fine line between clever and stupid

Don't be cute. Nobody wants to read long paragraphs of experimental prose or know what the bio writer wore to the show. Let chronology be your guide. Focus on who, what, when, where and why.

How long should it be?

One page is usually ideal for a new artist; try not to go much longer than two. Always remember that journalists are on deadline and want their info in quick, easily digestible bites.

The proof is the pudding

Do we really need to remind you to proofread the bio (and all other materials) carefully before you make copies and stuff envelopes? Typos, usage errors and other mistakes will not endear you to journalists.



Who is this band?
What do they sound
like? Why the hell
should I care about
them?

Editorial Emergency, LLC, is a new company formed by Julia Rubiner, erstwhile publicity editor for Geffen Records and DreamWorks Records, and Simon Glickman, former senior editor for music-industry trade publication HITS. Together, they have nearly 30 years' experience generating and utilizing PR materials. They've developed these guidelines to help you get your artist some ink.

If you're not sure everything's right, hire an editor to look it over. Consider this proofing period the mastering phase of your written materials – the last tweaks before you go public.

Give up the digits

Make sure all contact information – phone, e-mail, fax and website URL – appears prominently in the bio, preferably at the end.

Clips: What to Send

Review your reviews

Although you want to avoid hyping your own project, it's fine to let other people do the hyping for you. Rave reviews from credible music writers will frequently move your material closer to the top of a journalist's listening stack. Keep in mind, however, that journalists on deadline don't have time to comb through a massive stack of clips, so choose wisely. Top three should do it.

Blurbology

If you've collected reams of enthusiastic reviews, a quote sheet can be a very effective tool. Simply select the best excerpts, compile them on a page (with attributions) and you've got a nice summary of press response that will save journalists time and you postage. Best of all, with judicious use of ellipses, you can edit the reviews to include only the most complimentary copy. Here's an example:

Before: "This fairly promising L.A. band offers some engaging songs on its new album but often falls into the trap of bland adult pop."

After: "Promising L.A. band ... engaging songs."

Photo: Consult a Pro

Here at Editorial Emergency, our expertise is text. When we need a potent image, we hire an experienced photographer. We also recommend asking a publicist to look at your proof sheets and pick the shot most likely to succeed.

Press Release: Don't Cry Wolf

What is a press release?

It's an announcement to the media of a notable event, such as the release of an album or the booking of a tour. Don't issue a press release every time your artist sneezes. By the time you have a real story, the media will have long since dismissed you.

What goes into it?

Lead with a brief, punchy quote from the artist to grab the reader's attention: "We never would've finished this record if we'd gone into rehab," insists Red Markup, front-man for L.A. punk-pop band the Editors." Follow this in short order with the aforementioned who, what, when, where and why. Example: "Its vs. It's, the band's debut album, will be released April 1 on Editorial Emergency Records."

Keep it short and sweet, with just a few meaty details to impart personality.

After that, include a few illuminating quotes from the artist regarding the event, perhaps some remarks about who produced the album or how the band got the opening spot on the tour. If you're including a tour itinerary, remember to list date, venue and city.

How long should it be?

One page, unless you have a lot of genuinely critical information to convey. Keep it short and sweet, with just a few meaty details to impart personality.

Making contact

Be sure to prominently feature the press contact's name, e-mail, phone, fax and website URL.

What If I Need Professional Help?

Reach out to Editorial Emergency. We've written, revised and updated hundreds of artist bios, press releases, quote sheets, tour itineraries, corporate PR materials, Web pages, sales sheets, A&R pitch letters and more. Our clients have included major and independent labels, artist managers, publicists and unsigned acts. We'll work with you – and your budget – in creating top-quality, results-oriented promotional content that will separate your artist from the pack. Call us at the number below or visit www.editorialemergency.com for more info.



In case of editorial emergency,
break glass and call:

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