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## Developing Your Image: Creating Promotional Materials that Work

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### Who Are You? ◆

The image that you project consists of everything that contributes to your reputation. It includes not only the way in which you perform and what your colleagues think of you but also your professional habits: the way you dress, return calls, and follow through with plans. The focus of this chapter is on the components of a promotional toolbox—the pieces necessary for building a musician's professional image.

### Why Promote Yourself? ◆

Promotional materials tell the story of who you are and what your music is about. They are necessary for booking performances, attracting audiences, and selling CDs. They are crucial components to telling your story well.

The most basic promotional materials musicians need are bios, photos, and demo recordings. Subsequent chapters will cover recordings and online promotion; here the focus is on the content of written and visual materials.

The good news is that you can create most of these yourself. Musicians often ask, “Can’t I just pay someone to do all this for me?” The truth is, whether you hire professionals or do it yourself, you are still ultimately in charge of the content and presentation. Whether you work with an artist manager, publicist, or record label, you need to be an informed and savvy partner in all the decisions about your promotional materials. After all, it’s *your* career.

Many musicians have negative associations with any form of self-promotion. I have heard musicians describe it as repugnant, as a “necessary evil.” And I often encounter musicians who ask, “Why can’t the music speak for itself?”

To put this in perspective, many young performers believe their “job” as musicians is to practice and perform. Period. Some mistakenly may believe that once they become accomplished professionals, they will be protected from the crass world of commerce and the everyday details of handling finances, logistics, and publicity. They may imagine that the details of managing their career will be handled by their agent—or, perhaps, by a fairy godmother!

Here’s the reality: handling publicity is part of a musician’s job. *You* are the best person to tell your story. The challenge lies in creating promotional materials that effectively communicate who you are and what is distinctive about you and your music.

## **Brand YOU** ♦

*Branding* is a marketing concept from the business world that many arts organizations and individual musicians have also found useful. Branding is about clarifying your identity, mission, and reputation. It’s *not* about having slick promotional materials or creating a glamorous image. Branding, and the promotional effort that stems from it, is about articulating your true self, not putting up a false front. Branding involves communicating with a targeted audience using effective and consistent messages. It’s about creating a specific, accurate, and memorable positive impression. In other words, branding is about identifying your core mission and values, then working outward to tell others your story.

We each have stories that help define us as individuals, and we can choose which of these stories to use in our marketing materials and in our networking. Think through your past, both musical and non-musical. Sort through remembered anecdotes, old photos, and concert programs to help get a sense of what you’d like to communicate about yourself. Think about what you have done as a musician, what you intend to do, what you value, and what you have to offer.

On the most basic level, you need to have a distinct *brand* because otherwise, you are simply just another talented and well-trained performer, one

of thousands. Why should anyone take notice? There are simply far too many good musicians. Without something to distinguish you from all the others, you are anonymous. So the message here is to think carefully about yourself, your projects, and your intentions. What is your *mission*? Do you perform unusual or noteworthy repertoire? Have you been involved in interesting multimedia or experimental music projects? Have you performed for interesting charity causes? Your promotional materials should convey what is distinctive and special about you.

What makes all this worthwhile is that working on your brand and promotional materials should help you clarify your goals and your commitment, and should help you take a good look at where you are now so you can plan the next appropriate action steps. Ultimately, your music is a form of communication, a way to contribute positively to the world. Your image and brand should be an extension of this positive energy.

## What's Your Type? ♦

The first thing you need in terms of your brand and promotional materials is a recognizable and *consistent* typographic "I.D." The equivalent of a logo, or what might be called your "letterhead design," this needs to include your basic information. That is your name, or your ensemble's name, instrument/voice type, genre (if applicable, to clarify), and all your contact details: e-mail, phone, and social media addresses). To promote yourself effectively, choose a typeface (the design style of the letters) and a layout that will efficiently and attractively convey a real sense of both you and your music. This should appear in a consistent format on all your promotional materials: your website, flyer, postcard, CD cover, and all your correspondence.

Large corporations pay hundreds of thousands of dollars to advertising firms to design their businesses logos. Think "Coca-Cola" or "Dunkin' Donuts," and your mind's eye will probably conjure up the distinctive typeface designs of these companies' logos. You may not have the big bucks to hire a top-of-the-line graphic designer, but you can create a letterhead design that looks professional and helps promote your career and your music.

The idea is the same as a logo: by using it consistently, you help readers remember your name and what you do. Letterhead designs convey a certain "image" through the choice of typeface. Typeface can communicate all kinds of personalities and energies. If a picture is worth a thousand words, a typeface is worth at least 700.

For example, here are alternate designs using different typefaces and page layouts. The same name, in four different typefaces, reads like four very different musicians. Each look is professional, yet each communicates a somewhat different impression of the singer and her music.