Navigating the Modern Music Industry: From Production to Distribution

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Navigating the Modern Music Industry:  
From Production to Distribution

*Introduction*

The music industry is dynamic and continually changing and adapting as new technologies, platforms of distribution, and creative developments that affect everything from business models to artist/fan interaction emerge. From the 1950s, until the arrival of the Internet, the music industry was controlled by a few large conglomerates that gave little consideration to the interests of the artist or the fan. Musicians were controlled both creatively and financially in order to provide record companies with the greatest potential for financial success, and fans were subjugated to the consumption of relatively few musical genres.

In the twenty first century the roles of the record company, artists, and fan have undergone unprecedented changes. Today, technological advancements in the music industry have uprooted the traditional top-down business model and provided musicians with more power and control over their product and greater opportunity to achieve financial success. Artists can now produce, market, and distribute their music around the world for an extraordinarily low cost. Additionally, fans can now experience niche music markets previously unavailable in the music industry.

My professional project and scholarly wraparound explores the progressive aspects of the modern democratized and digitized music industry by examining do-it-yourself (DIY) producing and recording. For my professional project, I composed
music, produced, and distributed an electronic record of professional quality while maintaining low costs to keep within a tight financial budget. Following the production process, I framed my professional project within the modern context of the music industry. I then turned my focus to modern music distribution techniques such as low-cost social networking websites used for music marketing and building fan bases utilized by emerging and fringe musicians. Finally, I described my creative and technical process to provide a cognitive first-person account of my successes and challenges.

A Changing Industry

In order to understand where my professional project fits into the frame of the modern music industry, I first explored the industry’s past and the developments that have lead to the transfer of power from traditional large commercial record companies to artists and their fans. I then examined the changing role of the record producer and their need to evolve in order to stay current with the industry’s fluctuations.

According to Tschmuck, the traditional music industry business model was one based on accumulating profits and acquiring power. In order to accomplish this goal, record companies focused on three main points: controlling publishing rights; maintaining marketing and promotional power, and controlling all possible means of distribution between the artist and the potential consumer, allowing these companies to hoard power and profits (Tschmuck 254).
Industry trends from the 1950s up until the early 1990s show commercial record companies earned skyrocketing profits. In the 1950s, the number of people who owned record players increased rapidly, causing both the sales of records and the profits of record companies to increase. Companies received as much as 90% of the profits from record sales (Sen 5); thus, there was no incentive for them to change their business models. Some of the most staggering financial earnings took place from the mid 1970s into the early 1990s. Worldwide, record sales increased from $4.75 billion to $7 billion between 1973 and 1978. Record sales again made a huge leap between 1981 and 1992, climbing from $12 billion to $29 billion, all under the traditional top-down business model (Sen 6).

As profits for record companies continued to increase, music consumers became frustrated by the direction the industry was heading. Sen maintains that, “the traditional music industry structure had three major components: music and song creation; music marketing, and music distribution” (Sen 5). Because of the ineffective interactions among these three components, consumer costs continued to increase (Sen 5). Additionally, consumers were frustrated with the cookie-cutter approach that record companies took in releasing music. Record companies looked only to release commercially viable music, so they frequently adopted a policy of searching for a few acts that would hit “big time” (Kusek, Kindle Edition Location 1763). Artists who dreamed of financial success were, therefore, forced to create commercially viable
music. Tschmuck suggests, “traditional industry structures limited the unfolding of creation and innovation” (252).

By the end of the 1990s, the traditional business model changed and allowed artists and fans more freedom. With the invention of the MP3, which is an encoding format for digital audio, and increased use of the worldwide web, the music industry began to digitize, and for the first time music fans could not only purchase music online, but they were now also able to purchase individual tracks rather than entire collections. The new, cheaper, digital downloads began to replace the increasingly expensive CD, and digital downloads began to steadily increase. Between the year 2006 and 2007, digital downloads increased 45% (Sen 9). Sales increased from 16% of the total industry market in 2008, to 30% in 2009 (Calvi 125). Even more recently, digital sales made up 75% of all singles sold in the music industry (Sen 10).

As online sales increased, CD sales began to crash. In 2008, 361 million CDs were sold, a 20% drop from the year before. CD sales have halved since the beginning of 2010. While it was apparent to large commercial record companies that, in their antiquated form, their stake in the industry was at peril, they did very little to alleviate the problems. Dolata suggests that record companies failed to adapt sufficiently due to the difficulty of anticipating and reacting to the rapid influx of new technological advancements into an industry (Dolata 6). Kusek, however, writes:

The incumbent music companies were not sure how to handle the many issues associated with selling music online, and most major players
simply held out, and stayed put, in order to eke out the best possible deal. Most notable were the major labels that, for a long time, basically refused to license their catalogs to the early entrants into the digital space. A lot of song and dance went on, but few deals were closed, and even fewer actually allowed for any real business to happen. The result: music fans flocked to unlicensed services (Kindle Edition, 1775).

**The Changing Role of the Record Producer**

Technology is constantly changing and there is no exact formula for creating the next big hit. In order to have sustained success, the music producer's role evolved to stay current with the industry’s fluctuations. Producer/engineer legends such as Tom Dowd, Phil Ramone, and Al Schmitt have all put a lasting stamp on the music industry. Each is a pioneer in the music industry, having played a pivotal role in the development of studio recording and production. Some, like producer Chris Hazzel transitioned from an early career at a large recording studio, London Records, to working independently (Hazell.) These men, each of whom has decades of experience in the recording industry, not only knew how to work with an artist and guide the performance to bring out their best during a recording session, but each were able to combine current technology with past successes to remain at the top of their craft.

Alanis Morisette’s album *Jagged Little Pill*, which was produced by Glenn Ballard, is one example of how a hit record can be produced in a small home studio
(Behind the Glass.) This work serves as a transition point to the more recent example, of singer, songwriter, producer Justin Vernon (who records under the moniker Bon Iver). Vernon work proves that the art of engineering, production, and musicianship can be successfully combined into one role.

Regardless of the era in which they operated, each of the above producers contributed to the music industry. Much of their success can be attributed to their technical expertise. Moreover, their varied careers provide a time-line to create a benchmark analysis of how the role of a record producer has changed due to technology, and what aspects of the producer's job description has remained constant.

When considering how the art of modern audio production has been shaped, it’s hard to ignore Tom Dowd as being one of the industry's biggest influences. Dowd’s career had a somewhat unexpected start for someone who would make such a mark on the music world. He was a highly intelligent man who studied mathematics and physics while attending Columbia University. Dowd's proficiency in the fields of mathematics and science, led him to being a member of the Manhattan Project during WWII, (Language of Music) and after his discharge from the military, he used his skills and intellect to begin shaping the modern recording industry through technological advancements.

Dowd began his recording career in the late 1940s doing freelance work in New York City, but was eventually hired by Atlantic Records, for which he worked for the next twenty-five years. Dowd’s talents began to blossom not long after starting his
career at Atlantic. During his early years, he had a hand in engineering many great R&B and jazz artists such as Charles Mingus, John Coltrane, and Ray Charles (LanguageofMusic). Additionally, he had multiple contributions to the technological advancement of the recording industry. In 1952, Dowd introduced stereo mixing to Atlantic Records. The advancement of stereophony made Atlantic Records one of the first independent companies to release records in this format (AtlanticRecords). In concordance with developing and nurturing of new talent, stereo mixing provided Atlantic with an initial advantage over similarly sized record companies (AtlanticRecords.) What cemented Atlantic’s prominence in the recording industry, however, was Dowd first convincing, and then insisting that the record company's owners bring in, and install, the first eight track-recording machine at the company's in-house studio (Language of Music.) The eight track allowed musicians to record each instrument separately to be blended together later. This addition made Atlantic the first record company with the power of multi-track recording, and thanks to Dowd's foresight, propelled them to great success.

In addition to pioneering advancements in the sonic quality of music, he also can be credited for the customary linear faders on modern mixing boards. Before Dowd, rotary controls were used, making the mixing process more cumbersome than it is today. Through his inventions, Dowd has contributed to the technical advancements of the industry helping to define the role of the studio producer.
Another individual who has done much to define the ideal of a producer/engineer is Al Schmitt. As a young boy growing up in New York City, Schmitt was exposed to life in the studio, observing the inner workings of his uncle’s New York studio (VerveMusic.) After a short time in the US Navy, he landed his first permanent engineering gig working at Apex studio under his mentor and fellow engineering legend, Phil Ramone. Schmitt was eventually convinced to move to California, where he started engineering for RCA Records (VerveMusic.) While at RCA, he engineered albums by Al Hirt, Sam Cooke, Cal Tjader and Henry Mancini, who’s Hatari soundtrack won Schmitt his first Grammy in 1962 (VerveMusic.)

Schmitt, however, wanted to advance his career beyond engineering and into the role of producer. Due to RCA union regulations of the time, he was compelled to leave the studio, and its strict policies, to achieve his goal. During the mid to late 1960s, he became a freelance producer, working with the likes of Jefferson Airplane, Eddie Fisher, Sam Cooke, Hot Tuna and Jackson Browne (VerveMusic.)

Over the next four decades, Schmitt continued to produce hits in nearly every genre of music. During his career he has engineered, mixed and produced over 150 gold and platinum records, suggesting that versatility can be an important factor in the music business (Behindthe Glass.) In addition to his commercial success, Schmitt’s work has been critically acclaimed, earning Schmitt 18 Grammy Awards for his work with George Benson, Steely Dan, and Toto, among others (Discogs.)
One can hardly examine Al Schmitt’s success in the industry without also analyzing his compatriot and mentor, Phil Ramone. From an early age, Ramone was passionate about music, and he wrote about his devotion in the book, *Making Records*, “While most ten year olds were outside playing ball, I was inside playing violin.” Ramone cites his love of music as both a catalyst and an influence for the success he attained during his career (*Making Records.*)

Ramone’s passion for music performance eventually transformed into an appreciation of the technical aspects of music recording. In the early 1960s, he opened his own recording studio A&R Recording, with partner Jack Arnold (*Starpulse.*) At A&R, Ramone gained some recognition in the industry, working with celebrated jazz artists such as John Coltrane and Stan Getz, winning his first Grammy for the Getz/Gilberto album in 1964. As the 1960s progressed, Ramone continued to hone his engineering skills, while gradually trying his hand at producing records. He started with small rock groups, and by the end of the decade, had moved onto producing top-notch pop albums with A-list artists like James Taylor, Aretha Franklin and Bob Dylan (*PhilRamone.*) Once Ramone started plying his trade to top names, he never looked back. Over the next four decades, he produced an impressive number of records in seemingly every genre. His ability to work with an artist, pushing them creatively and inspiring them to give their best performances, lead him to compiling thirty-three Grammy nominations and a total of fourteen Grammys (*PhilRamone.*)
Additionally, Ramone contributed to the technical advancement of the music industry. He was one of the main advocates for the switch to the Compact Disc format for album releases, and in 1982, the Ramone-produced 52nd Street by Billy Joel, became the first album to be released on compact disc. Furthermore, Ramone was a key figure in the development of Hi-Definition recording and surround sound audio. In regard to record production, Ramone's focus went beyond time and budget. He brought a creative and innovative mind that was key to development of the archetype for the modern music producer.

The role of the record producer continued to evolve. Glen Ballard transitioned from a classic producer, with a big budget and commercial recording studio, to a mobile producer with a relatively small budget and in-home studio. Like the successful producers that preceded him, Ballard collaborated with many popular artists in commercial studio settings. Throughout his career, he worked with a long list of esteemed talents such as Michael Jackson, Shakira, Goo Goo Dolls, Katie Perry and Barbara Streisand (Ballard). With over 150 million record sales, six Grammy Awards, and number one hits across almost every genre of music, Ballard is considered one of the modern era’s most successful producers and songwriters (GlenBallard).

Ballard’s work on the album, Jagged Little Pill, which he co-wrote and produced with Alanis Morissette in 1995, further propelled his reputation and career. To date, this record has sold over thirty-five million copies worldwide yielding numerous hit singles and remaining in the top twenty on the Billboard 200 albums.
Remarkably, *Jagged Little Pill* was recorded using the Alesis Digital Audio Tape format (ADAT) at Ballard's in-home studio, not at a large commercial recording studio (*Behind the Glass*).

He partnered with Canadian singer and songwriter Morissette and the two wrote and produced what would become Morissette's first internationally released album. In the book *Behind the Glass*, he is asked how much of *Jagged Little Pill* was actually recorded outside of a major studio?

“It was 75 percent done in my home studio, which is certainly a professional situation, but is not a commercial studio. The entire genesis of every track was done there, so everything was created in that environment, just with the two of us (*BehindtheGlass*)”.

Not only was the album written and recorded on the then groundbreaking ADAT format, but according to Ballard, the edits were accomplished via ADAT to ADAT transfer, and the record was mixed entirely on Ballard's home studio mixer. *Jagged Little Pill* was a catalyst for change in the music industry because it proved hit record could be produced with a relatively small budget outside of a commercial recording studio. Furthermore, Glen Ballard redefined the potential role of a producer. Ballard collaborated with the artist throughout each step of the process. He stated in an interview about Morissette that, “she had enough trust in me to empower me to do my thing, and I had enough trust in her to say, let's go there” (*ArtistHouseMusic*). Ballard's use of a small, in-house studio influenced the future of
the music industry. The success of *Jagged Little Pill* set the foundation for future home studio producers such as, Justin Vernon of Bon Iver.

Justin Vernon was born and raised in Eau Clair, Wisconsin, and in 2000, formed his first band, DeYarmond Edison (Askmen.) While working and performing in Raleigh, North Carolina, the band released two records. After a traumatic break-up with his girlfriend, Vernon chose to leave the band and move back to Wisconsin to spend time recuperating at his father's cabin (Guardian.) When Vernon returned to Wisconsin, he brought with him a laptop with a Digi 001 ProTools interface, an old Macintosh laptop and a Shure SM57 microphone (Soundhow.) During his months isolated in the cabin, Vernon wrote, recorded, and produced the album *For Emma, Forever Ago*, which was inspired by a purging of his personal struggles. The professional quality of *For Emma, Forever Ago*, which was later released by Jagjaguwar, an independent record label, was surprising considering the limited recording equipment and the low cost of making of the album. The success of *For Emma, Forever Ago*, which received critical acclaim topping out at 64 on the Billboard top 200 charts (Billboard,) demonstrates the evolution of the music industry from large-scale, large budget productions to an artist being able to produce their album from the confines of a cabin.

Record producer, Chris Hazell had some compelling and relevant insight into what he thought were some of the industry's future trends as well as a number of important factors that contributed to many of the industry's recent changes. Hazell,
who worked for London Records for almost two decades, now owns his own production company, ICBA music, where he arranges and produces classical music. In a personal interview, I asked Hazell what aspects of the recording industry have changed since he began his career? Hazell responded by stating:

The industry has changed hugely since I started. First off, there was the technical change from analog to digital...[and] equipment has, for the most part become much cheaper, at least you can get good technical results with relatively cheap gear (Hazell.)

Hazell went on to say that the ability to produce music is becoming easier to access for more people, “for one reason, because of the cost.” Today, tracks can be recorded and stored onto laptops using digital programs that are cheap in relation to their analog counterparts, allowing more people to enter the industry. One important point that Hazell emphasized is:

Experience and knowledge is just as important [as equipment.] Some clients do not understand that just because someone owns the proper equipment, that does not make them a qualified producer, and that the skilled people in the industry are more expensive to hire when going up against a man down the road that has similar equipment (Hazell.)

I asked Hazell if he witnessed any changes in the monetary aspects of the music industry, such as financing, since he first began his career as a producer? Hazell revealed several:
The financial way of the world has also changed recordings. In the old days we had time to get a location and set up comfortably, and the sessions themselves were relatively leisurely. Now Budgets are all! Everything has to be done as quickly and as cheaply as possible (Hazell.)

He goes on to point out that this more recent change in the music industry's financial workings may be due, in part, to revenues from compact disc (CD) sales being down.

People tend to download the tracks or albums they want, which is a lot cheaper for them. As a musical arranger holding copyrights, I know how much less I get from a download compared to a CD. Additionally, repertoire is based so much nowadays on forecasts of returns rather than musical, or artistic decisions, making a smaller budget all important to a high profit (Hazell.)

From Tom Dowd to Chris Hazell, producers have found success in the music industry by remaining current with the industry's fluctuations. Many records are now produced in small, in-house studios with lower budgets compared to the costs incurred at larger commercial record studios. The record producer's role continues to transform. The ability to be versatile in both the technical, as well as the artistic aspects of record making has become increasingly important. Additionally, the technology of making records has shifted. Gear is now cheaper and smaller allowing almost anyone to create
a marketable product. The record industry is facing a push toward independent production, and as technology continues to advance, the role of the record producer will continue to be dynamic and ever developing.

A New Industry Emerging

With record companies reeling, and new Internet technologies (such as social networking) emerging and becoming increasingly mainstream, artists began to reconsider the necessity of a major record deal for economic viability. Thanks to the Internet, artists no longer needed record companies for promotion and distribution. Digital platforms offered the means for artists to manage their own careers without being under the overbearing control of a massive, commercial record company (Kusek, Kindle Edition 1775). Additionally, the Internet enhanced the music consumers' exposure to their favorite artists. Instead of having the buffer of a record company controlling communication between artists and fans, the Internet provides a means of direct communication, allowing music consumers to feel more connected to the music and careers of artists.

A prime example of the modern digitized music industry is the 2007 release of Radiohead’s album *In Rainbows*. The band distributed the album via its own website, allowing fans to pay what they thought the album was worth. According to Young and Collins, the record sold at least six times more than their previous record that was released on CD and netted somewhere in between $6 and $12 million (345). Success
such as this demonstrates the effectiveness that Internet distribution can have for artists because of the freedom they receive being separated from record companies.

**Methods:**

*Project*

My professional project and distribution methods are in the same vein as those of Radiohead. By experimenting with DIY production and distribution, I explored the utility of a record company for an emerging artist in the modern music industry much like Radiohead did for established musicians. The project portion of my work focused on my creative and technical abilities. Under the professional name REYO, I composed and produced a record titled *Computer Problems* which is of professional quality both sonically and graphically, (cover art, etc.) with the intent to assist industry professionals, and new artists, to obtain a first-person insight into how to begin a DIY career in the modern digitized music industry. The project was completed with a low budget and utilized DIY recording techniques in order to produce a high quality record.

*Computer Problems* is comprised of eleven songs and covers a variety of genres from 1980s retro to Latin American music. For production purposes, I used the digital audio workstation (DAW) Logic Pro. Logic is a professional standard DAW, and due to technological developments, is now available to the public for the cost of $199.99. The program offers musicians and producers the ability to record, mix, and master all in one program, making it extraordinarily useful for the DIY artist.
For the majority of my project, I used the Musical Instrument Digital Interface (MIDI) to write and produce the album. MIDI is a data protocol that allows producers to replicate classical instrumental sounds as well as create their own. MIDI is useful for the modern DIY musician and producer because it offers the ability of a wide range of sounds for a low cost compared to purchasing the instruments needed to make similar sounds acoustically. In order to record the MIDI files into Logic, I used an Axiom 49 MIDI keyboard which allows artists to play MIDI into their DAW, as well as manipulate various MIDI plug-ins that the DAW may already have.

In addition to the use of MIDI technology in my production process, I recorded vocals for the album using an M-Audio ProFire 610 along with a vocal mic. The Profire 610 is a digital audio interface that converts audio recorded acoustically into a digital audio datastream that is utilized by DAWs like Logic Pro. The interface is convenient for recording outside of a music studio due to its small size and economy. Also, I used a Shure SM 58 microphone for vocal recording. The Shure SM58 is an industry classic known for its durability and low cost, making it a vital piece of equipment for emerging DIY artists.

The final pieces of gear that I used during the production process were a pair of Samson Media O-N-E 4a studio monitors. The monitors are small and portable, but also provide a wide frequency range that is important for mixing a quality record. The total budget of the production aspects of the record was a minimal $1000. Production occurred mostly in a small bedroom adapted to record and mix music. I began by
writing and producing the musical aspects of each song using the MIDI capabilities of Logic Pro, and then wrote and recorded vocals for each song at a later time.

**Marketing and Distribution**

While there are advantages for well-established artists in the digitized music industry, my professional project and scholarly wraparound addresses emerging artists, and how social media and economical music distribution websites may help them build a fan base and start a career within the industry. Marketing and distribution of the record was done through various social media and low-cost distribution Websites in an attempt to find which distribution and grassroots marketing method was most effective for artists trying to get a foot into the music industry. Social networking sites were invaluable for developing a following and connecting with a fan base. Promotion on sites such as Facebook and Twitter let me build up a following and promote my music to a large number of people for free. Additionally, this enabled me to direct possible fans to the distribution Websites where they could buy or download the music that I released.

I distributed *Computer Problems* through three different digital platforms. The first, SoundCloud, is a social networking sites which positions itself as a source for musicians to network, communicate together, and distribute their music. Of the three levels of service that SoundCloud offers, I utilized the free service. Each service is described below:
1) Free service- where artists receive a one-hour total of upload time and limited statistics on whom and where people are listening to their music.

2) Pro version - where artists receive 4-hours of upload time as well as comprehensive statistics for 3 Euros, or around $4 per month.

3) Unlimited version- where artists can upload audio without a time limit in addition to receiving unlimited statistics. The unlimited service costs 9 Euros, or around $12 per month.

The second service I used to distribute my professional project is Bandcamp. This service is a music distribution website that is free to musicians to use and offers them the ability to upload either singles or entire albums to the website (buy does not offer a smartphone app for fans to access). Bandcamp does, however, allow artists to upload music onto their own specific page for people to browse. Additionally, the site works with PayPal to give its customers a reliable source to set up their financial systems with their Website. Bandcamp is free for artists to use – there is no start-up cost or fee for uploading tracks. Artists are able to determine the cost of their single/album ranging from $0 to whatever amount they choose. Additionally, fans are able to pay extra for the album if they consider the artist’s work to be worth the extra money. To make a profit, Bandcamp takes 2.9%, plus tax, off of any transaction.

I used the music distribution service CD Baby as my final means of distribution. CD Baby offers worldwide digital distribution by uploading artist’s music on iTunes, Spotify, Amazon music, and other international platforms for digital music
downloading and streaming. CD Baby charges artists either $12.95 for a single upload, or $49 for an entire album.

Analysis

The following section will discuss the effectiveness of each of the three sites used for the distribution of Computer Problems. Additionally, it will discuss the trials and tribulations of the production and digital distribution process. Finally, it will make recommendations for future DIY musicians on how to proceed in using a combination of digital distribution websites in order to successfully reach customers, and other parties, interested in consuming an artist’s music. Each site will be described below in non-quantitative terms, but rather in relation to greater trends in site activity observed over a period of four months of distribution of the album Computer Problems.

CD Baby

CD Baby offers, undoubtedly, the widest range of distribution of any of the sites explored during the project. Through the use of CD Baby’s services, Computer Problems was successfully distributed to an extensive range of digital partners including iTunes, Spotify, and Amazon Music for the price of $49 plus a website service fee. The following discussion will highlight the pros and cons of CD Baby’s service as it relates to the distribution of Computer Problems.

CD Baby offers multiple services to DIY musicians. One of the finest aspects of CD Baby’s service is the customer and fan's ability to utilize such a wide range of
options to access an artist’s music. For example, the site’s partners include both download and radio streaming services, allowing fans broad opportunities for accessing an artist’s music that otherwise might go undiscovered. In addition to distribution to their partners, consumers can search and download an artist’s music directly from the CD Baby website. Furthermore, CD Baby provides its members with a breakdown of which of their website partners is earning the musician profits.

On the downside, CD Baby offers less customization for an artist. Artist pages on the CD Baby website are generic, so it is harder to present an image that is specific, or stands out from the rest of the site’s offering. While site customization may not be a critical factor for digital sales, it can help DIY musicians establish an artist brand.

The utilization of CD Baby in the distribution of Computer Problems was a partial success. While the album’s musical content was accessed from many of CD Baby’s digital distribution partners, an artist starts around $69 in the financial hole. Furthermore, CD Baby and their partners take a percentage of the profits from transactions, further limiting an artist’s ability to turn an effective profit from the start. While a musician may be reluctant to start in a deficit, utilizing CD Baby is far more efficient for the average DIY artist than negotiating a deal with a record company. On balance, CD Baby offers a solid product that can be used by emerging artists to reach music consumers.

SoundCloud
SoundCloud was the second of three Websites used in the distribution of *Computer Problems*. Similar to CD Baby, SoundCloud had both positive and negative aspects to their service. An advantage of using SoundCloud for the emerging musician is that they offer a free version of their product. Artists can upload up to 2-hours of music free of charge, providing excellent exposure without a financial commitment. A second advantage offered by SoundCloud is their social networking site for musicians and fans. Each member has their own profile page, and they can like another artist's music or follow their page. What SoundCloud has successfully created is a platform for communication and sharing between musicians and their fans. Finally, SoundCloud offers comprehensive statistics on which of an artist’s songs are receiving the most plays, downloads, and likes, allowing musicians to know where they are having their most success in distribution.

While SoundCloud provides a functional tool for music distribution and inter-artist communication, it lacks in some key areas that limited its usefulness for the distribution of *Computer Problems*. First, the site provides no option for direct monetization of music. Consumers are able to download an artist’s music, but there is not an option for the artist to charge a fee, or if the fan deems the music worthy, voluntarily pay for the music. Second, even though each artist is provided with their own profile page, there is little they can do to customize the consumer experience. So again, (like CD Baby) the development of an artist image is restricted by the uniformity of the SoundCloud profile page. Finally, and possibly most critical, an
The artist is unable to package music uploads into album form. All uploads onto a SoundCloud profile are done individually, and subsequently cannot be downloaded in album format. So, if a consumer wants to download an entire album, they must download each track individually, making the process inconvenient.

SoundCloud was by far the least effective site used in the distribution process of Computer Problems, mostly due to the lack of any feature for monetization or complete album download. While SoundCloud was somewhat ineffective for the distribution of an entire album, it is still a useful and free tool for artists to make their work available to possible consumers.

Bandcamp

Bandcamp was the third, and final, website used for the distribution of Computer Problems and offered the most complete list of features out of the three sites utilized. Unlike CD Baby or Soundcloud, Bandcamp permits artists to customize their page to a greater extent. Each musician’s page can be designed with artist-specific graphics and color schemes that give the consumer a more specialized experience when searching for undiscovered musicians. Additionally, the pay/download system of Bandcamp offers a diverse way for artists to distribute their music, and permits consumers to choose how much they are willing to pay for it, or if they want to pay at all. Bandcamp’s distribution system allows for monetization of artist's music, but it does not inhibit overall distribution if a consumer does not wish to pay. Therefore, the
inclusion of a “name your price” method of payment diversifies the options that a musician has when using Bandcamp’s service. An added positive of using Bandcamp is the ability to link one’s artist page directly to their own merchandising. Consumers can simply click on the ‘merchandise’ link and begin searching for posters, T-shirts, or any other product that a musician or band may have created. This feature allows artists to make money through both music distribution, and the sale of merchandise, which neither CD Baby nor SoundCloud provides in their services. Finally, on top of all the convenient features that the site offers, there is no direct payment needed by an artist for the use of Bandcamp’s services. The site simply takes a small portion off the top of each sale, allowing the artist to keep the majority of the profits.

For the distribution of Computer Problems, Bandcamp’s diverse options and artist page customization made it the most effective of the three Websites used. Allowing consumers to pay what they felt the album was worth allowed for both the unencumbered free music distribution that is helpful in building an initial fan base, as well the ability to make a profit off of my work. While there were more free downloads of Computer Problems than paying downloads, the fact that a percentage of fans were willing to make a financial commitment to the album illustrates that Bandcamp’s distribution methods do function.

Furthermore, the ability to customize my artist page opened up doors for financial gains that were unexpected at the beginning of the production and distribution processes. Upon the release of Computer Problems, I expected to only
realize financial gains from direct album downloads and Internet streaming. However, I was approached by the Ohio University Scripps College of Communication for music to be utilized in video advertisements for purposes of University promotions. Having the customized artist page provided by Bandcamp’s service gave me a professional looking platform to present to the University when opening negotiations for licensing rights. Additionally, the ease of use that Bandcamp’s site offers allowed the video producer the ability to listen to all of the tracks on the album before downloading the one that would fit best in their promotional video. In the end, a limited rights licensing contract was negotiated with an option for future cooperation between the University and REYO Productions. Surprisingly, the financial profits from licensing the rights to video producers actually superseded the profits from downloads and streaming. Without utilizing Bandcamp’s service, these profits may not have been realized.

In addition to the opportunity of licensing my music for use in video productions, Bandcamp provided an avenue for live performance. Artists on Bandcamp’s website are organized both by genre and by geographical region. Consequently, Computer Problems is categorized in the Columbus Ohio region, allowing interested parties to locate artists from that specific area. What made the regional categorizing pertinent to my research was that a local venue promoter contacted me with interest in a live performance. A representative from Bridging the Music, an organization interested in showcasing local musicians in a region’s music
scene, inquired about me performing at a showcasing event. Due to other scholastic commitments I was unable to participate; however, having the opportunity to expand my musical reach to a live audience shows the value of using Bandcamp as a source of distribution and artist promotion.

**Recommendations**

Various aspects of the production and distribution of *Computer Problems* can serve as a road map for future artists who wish to pursue a DIY music career. To start, the utilization of a relatively low production and distribution budget was a success, illustrating that a quality project can be completed without the financial commitment necessary to produce an album under a traditional record contract systems of the past. For future musicians looking to gain momentum in the industry, a similar production process as the one used in the making of *Computer Problems* may prove successful.

A second recommendation is to take advantage of all opportunities and sources to distribute one’s music, for free, or at low cost. While the different distribution sites used in this particular project had different levels of effectiveness, each one heightened the odds of the music arriving at a consumer’s ears. Every listen counts when attempting to break into the industry, so even using sites such as SoundCloud (which has its deficiencies) can be useful to an artist. This is especially the case when one online stream of a song could be the difference between acquiring an opportunity
to license one's music for monetary gain, or having an MP3 file sit on an artist’s computer desktop.

Finally, the development of a consistent and professional artist image can be pertinent in both advertising music and negotiating deals that go beyond simple digital distribution. Knowing how to develop a persona for a band or artist is an invaluable skill. Representing oneself graphically in a professional matter can assist in negotiating with outside parties for licensing and performance deals. For example, an artist who’s image looks professional, prepared, and well thought out, is likely to have greater success when presenting themselves to outside parties than one who has spent little time or effort developing their own image. Consequently, the artist with a well developed image will likely have a greater chance at monetizing their music.

While the above recommendations were derived from the process of production and distribution of *Computer Problems*, they are not the final word for obtaining success as a DIY musician. They do serve as a possible guide and starting point for artists who desire to produce and distribute and album in a similar fashion.

**Conclusion**

My professional project and scholarly wraparound aimed to provide both a practical and scholastic examination of the changing, and newly emerging music industry, while taking into account the evolving role of the record company, producer, artist, and fan. The investigation of progressive aspects of the modern democratized
and digitized music industry, and DIY producing and recording, provides a road map on how to create and distribute a professional project on a low budget and without the use of a record label. *Computer Problems* illustrates one artist’s ability to successfully entrench themself into the modern music industry.

Since technological advancements in the music industry have uprooted the traditional top-down business model and provided musicians have greater opportunity to achieve financial success, large commercial record company contracts will likely be offered to a shrinking cohort of artists. The making of *Computer Problems* provides examples of the diverse monetization options available for possible revenue streams that exist outside of traditional record deals. Musicians now have greater control over their product, but with that control can come unanticipated opportunities. For example, *Computer Problems* earned digital distribution profits; however, pursuing licensing for video production was an unexpected avenue for financial gain. The combination of the two sources exemplifies the diversity of revenue streams now available, providing further verification that musicians no longer need to search for a big record deal in order to profit from their music.

The distribution of *Computer Problems* saw considerable success and included the research and examination of three prominent digital distribution websites. The direct comparison of the three sites serves as a guide for future artists and fans to navigate distribution and purchasing options. The idea of worldwide availability to consumers is an exciting prospect for a fledgling artist, and the distribution of
*Computer Problems* shows that worldwide exposure can be attained in a simple and affordable manner. *Computer Problems* is now available to potential customers around the world via iTunes, Spotify, Amazon, and other online sources.

The distribution of *Computer Problems* may have, however, been more profitable, and experienced more digital downloads, with an increased level of artist self-promotion. A higher level of self-promotion could have opened up further prospects for licensing music for video productions and acquiring live performance opportunities. Furthermore, it would have been advantageous to the expansion and distribution of the REYO artist brand name if the live performance opportunity that was offered would have come to fruition. Unfortunately, a lack of foresight left me unprepared for possible live performance prospects. Future projects will likely be more successful by taking this type of opportunity into account.

Finally, increasing the time frame for collecting digital download data would have provided more information and allowed for a more thorough analysis of each distribution method. The observation period lasted a span of about four months. Expanding the data collection time frame to at least a year would yield more conclusive results as to which method of distribution provides the best opportunity for monetary gain and artist exposure in the long term.

The production of *Computer Problems* attempts to serve as a snapshot of what is taking place in this dynamic and continually changing music industry. The record was essentially produced in a bedroom on a laptop computer, a production process
which just decades ago would have been unthinkable. Technological advancements have allowed musicians a pathway into a field that in the past was far too expensive and limited many artist's creativity. As a result of these advancements, more musicians now have access into the music industry because of the affordability of low cost equipment. Artists are no longer forced to work within the constraints of the large commercial record companies. Additionally, fans now have the ability to purchase a much wider range of music, and a greater variety of musical genres, from numerous online Internet sources – a trend that benefits both artists and fans. As demonstrated by the production and distribution of *Computer Problems*, today's democratized and digitized music industry makes it possible for musicians to successfully navigate the modern music industry from production to distribution.
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This website offers insight into the ever evolving role of the music producer. Glen Ballard transitioned from a classic producer, with a big budget and commercial recording studio, to a mobile producer with a relatively small budget and in-home studio. Like the successful producers that preceded him, Ballard collaborated with many popular artists in commercial studio settings. Throughout his career, he worked with a long list of esteemed artists such as Michael Jackson, Shakira, Goo Goo Dolls, Katie Perry and Barbara Streisand. With millions in record sales, six Grammy Awards and number one hits across almost every genre of music, Ballard is considered one of today's most successful producers and songwriters and studying his place within the history of music production is valuable to understanding how the modern industry functions.


This article discusses how people within the music industry build audiences through the use of social networking websites. It discusses both historical and modern perspectives and what implications social networking websites have on audience building and industry business models. The article focuses on strategies used by large record companies to change their business models to incorporate new technologies, as well as addressing potential record company liabilities due to social networking websites. While this article centers mainly on large record companies, it remains of value to my personal research based on the authors' exploration of how record companies reacted to the industry’s technological revolution and how social networks function within the world of music.


This article discusses several new channels in which music is distributed and marketed within the modern music industry. It highlights five specific models, including network marketing, traditional publishing, digital streaming, digital
downloading, and electronic commerce. These five marketing/distribution models are examined for their effectiveness and their ability to create new and effective business strategies within the music industry. The work focuses specifically on digital platforms such as iTunes and Napster and how both of these companies generate revenue. Regrettably, the scope of this article is too broad to provide detailed information on the relationship between social networks and emerging musicians; however, its discussion of digitally based business models provides helpful background knowledge for my research. Sections focusing on digital downloads/streaming may prove to be the most helpful to answering how social networking/low cost music distribution websites effect musicians.


The primary purpose of this article is to highlight how technological advances that initiated from sources outside of the music industry have caused a disruption in the socio-economic structures of the industry as a whole. This article argues that technologically based pressures are hard to anticipate and react to, and as a result, the music industry tried to impede the onset of technology rather than accept it. Additionally, the article questions whether the changes that occurred within the music industry have caused large record companies to loose permanent control. The information within this article helps my research because of its discussion of technological pressures that caused the industry to change, how technological pressures are hard to predict and adapt to, and what long-term consequences might be store for future industry business models. All three of the aforementioned topics provide great background information on how social networks affect emerging artists in the music industry.


This article is a quantitative study using data from a survey to determine if music fans use the Internet to find new music, and if they do, what sites are their favorites. The author explains that due to digitization, many folksonomies have been created within the music industry, and the Internet is a valuable tool for finding new niche genres of music. His research shows many do use the Internet in order to find new music, suggesting that is valuable for unknown
artists to upload their work online. One criticism of the study is that the sample group included only 18 people. The paper does, however, address this criticism and states the author’s hope for continued research in the subject area. This research is undoubtedly useful for my professional project and thesis because it not only suggests that music fans search for new music on the internet, but it also discusses some of the most popular social networking websites that fans use to find music.


This book provides an example of how the record industry functioned before the digital revolution took place. The author provides personal, behind the scenes, insight into interactions and processes that took place between producer and artist during record production. This book specifically highlights the role of producers as both a creative and managing force when dealing with artistic talent. Additionally, this work provides an important first hand account of how the music industry functioned and the role of producers before the digital revolution. Unfortunately, this work does not include much information about the producer/artist relationship in the modern music industry. However, the narrative in this book will help provide background information and historical context for the scholarly paper that will accompany my professional project.

Hazell, Chris. E-mail Interview. February 12, 2012.

Record producer, Chris Hazell had compelling and relevant insight into what he thought were some of the industry's future trends as well as a number of important factors that contributed to many of the industry's recent changes. Hazell, who worked for London Records for almost two decades, now owns his own production company, ICBA music, where he arranges and produces classical music. His experience and current employment made his interview relevant to my own personal research and will help me to understand the possible directions that the modern music industry may take.

This book is a comprehensive overview of production and recording techniques for record producers. It offers both specific and general information on how to record and produce a successful record. This book covers micing techniques, uses for effects such as EQ and compressors, and methods of mixing and mastering. Additionally, it focuses on how future technology will shape how records are produced. The book’s content is easy to understand and apply in a real work production setting. Advice within this book will help me to create professional sounding music that has a high level of both sonic and production quality.


This article discusses both the economic and social impacts of the digitization of the music industry. The author writes that the Internet has allowed the development of markets for niche music genres as well as online platforms for fans to congregate and discuss and share new music. Additionally, he focuses on how the music industry’s digital revolution has broken down the barrier between fans and artists allowing them to communicate directly with one another. While the article is a little outdated considering the pace at which the music industry has changed, it still has valuable information to offer my research. The separation of social and economic aspects of change will help me understand where exactly my project and research fits into the modern music industry. Additionally, the article offers background information for why and how the digital revolution happened, and what social affects the influx of technology had on the music industry as a whole.


This book does not specifically address the music industry, but more the technological revolution that took place in the media industry as a whole. The author discusses online media fan bases as well as social aspects of the battle for control between traditional large media companies and costumers. The author argues that the convergence of technologies is changing the way we conduct our business and our lives. While the book does not talk directly about the music industry and social networking websites, it has valuable and current information on media industry trends and how they are affecting our lives. The
information presented in this book will form a basis for where changes in music fit into our social and cultural lives.


This book is an autobiography by Quincy Jones, one of the greatest producers the music industry has seen. In the book, Jones discusses not only technical aspects of making a record but also the creative aspects of song and lyric writing. In addition, Jones discusses some of the greatest records he has produced and how his success can translate to new and emerging artists and producers. While the books content is mostly informal, the information Jones presents is valuable to those attempting to record and produce an album. This book will assist me in producing the best musical content I can, as well as providing background information on the role of a producer within a studio setting.


The primary purpose of this book is to provide insight into how the modern digital music industry functions and discusses the impact of technology and the digital revolution on the evolving music industry. Additionally, this book provides a great overview into the workings of the modern music industry and examines how technology is making access to music easier for the average person. This work offers a discussion of topics that range from the traditional music industry business models to how the emerging modern artist can benefit from industry changes. The themes highlighted in this book relate directly to my research which includes the affect social networks have on new and emerging artists. Much of this book focuses on how artists can benefit from new technologies in the industry, and this work will prove to be a valuable resource for my research.


This work provides information about how records were made before the digital revolution of the music industry and provides insight into transitional periods within the business. The author offers a series of one-on-one interviews
with Grammy award winning music producers who give accounts of their experiences during their careers. From the text, we can ascertain information about the role of music producer and gain insight into the production of Alanis Morissette’s revolutionary record *Jagged Little Pill*, which serves as a transition point between traditional and modern record making. This interview in particular highlights the changing role of producers at the end of the 20th century. The most important segment of this work contributing to my research is the interview on the making of *Jagged Little Pill*, because it illustrates the changing role of producers at the cusp of the music industry's digital revolution.


This book provides a general outline for most aspects regarding the music industry. The book describes relationships among producers, musicians, record companies and marketing firms, as well as legal aspects of the industry such as copyright and publishing rights. Additionally, it highlights several forms of revenue streams for artists, such as merchandising, music sales, and live shows. Furthermore, the book discusses several licensing opportunities that may present themselves to musicians and allow for an increase in revenue. This book is nearly an all-encompassing work that addresses information prospective music industry professionals need know to start their careers. While the work does not specifically discuss low cost music distribution websites, the information on copyright and licensing will be vital for knowing how to protect my creative work.


This article addresses the power that social networking websites have over artists and record labels that try to use them for advertising and constructing fan bases. It focuses on how algorithms that websites such as Facebook use to filter information that appears on user pages are changed, sometimes weekly, and that this trend might detract from the number of people who see posts from record companies or musicians. In order to be sure that fans see posts made by artists/record companies, they need to pay for an advertisement. While people in the industry were initially in opposition to the change, advertising on websites like Facebook is relatively cheap, and provides a guaranteed opportunity for artists to reach out to their fans. Additionally, the article discusses how Facebook's
filtration policy has led some artists to use Twitter or other social networking websites in order to have unfiltered communication with their fans. While this article does present interesting advertising trends within the music industry, it contains relatively unspecific numerical information and is mostly constructed around the opinions of two high level record executives and not niche market or emerging musicians. However, knowing the level of power that social networking websites have in information filtration will be important to decisions I make in the future about how to best market and distribute my professional project.


The article addresses social networks, digitization, and technology in regards to the affect they have had on the music industry. The article addresses how the technological revolution has affected revenue streams and industry business models as well as how social networks have opened up the door for “niche” music markets. Additionally, the article argues that the music industry has responded well to the introduction of new technologies and that the development of new revenue streams has been highly innovated, setting up the industry for a future of success. This work is unique because the information in the study was compiled through an interview process from the prospective of people who work in the industry every day instead of presenting only quantitative information about industry trends. There are two specific aspects of this article that pertain to my research. The first is that information discussed in the article is obtained through an interview process providing an insight into what actual professionals consider to be important industry trends. The second is that the work addresses how social networks effect “niche” artists in terms of building a fan base and marketing their music.


This paper looks at music distribution and fan base building tendencies of smaller musicians through anthropological and ethnographic lenses. The research focuses on musicians in two small American college towns and how they distribute music using social networking and Internet technology. Focusing on the music industry in a more anthropological sense provides a different perspective for the effectiveness of social networking distribution in place of the traditional industry analysis methods. The information in this
article will greatly assist my research due to the similarities between Athens, Ohio and the two towns used in the study. Additionally, this paper will help me understand the social relationships between emerging musicians and their fans, as well as effective ways to build social capital through the use of social networking websites.


This book offers a complete and cohesive walk-through for record production and delivery. It begins with tips for song creation and development and continues into advice covering technical aspects such as mixing and mastering. Additionally, there is a discussion of marketing and distribution techniques to inform artists and producers of how to monetize their products. The information is presented in a manner that is both easy to find and conducive to helping the modern audio producer. The various production tips will help my professional project have to best sonic quality possible, and the information about marketing will assist me in forming a plan to best distribute my music once it is complete.


This article emphasizes the reasons for why the music industry has become more democratized due to digitization and technological advancements. It provides important quantitative data on music industry revenue streams from the 1950s into the modern era. Resulting trends highlight how great of an impact the technological revolution has had on the music industry. Additionally, this article discusses possible opportunities for increased flexibility and profit for artists in the new digital industry. The data found in this article will help provide background information on historical trends within the industry. Furthermore, the article's discussion of modern distribution methods will help support additional information that I collect during my research.

This documentary depicts the life and career of Tom Dowd, one of the most influential and dynamic producers in the music industry. It is vital to study the career of Dowd in order to understand how the music industry has advanced into its modern form. The documentary highlights some of Dowd’s technological discoveries as well as the legacy that he left behind. While the documentary does not provide any direct references to my specific research, studying one of the most important figures in the advancement of the role of the music producer is undoubtedly useful in building a historical context for my work.


This article focuses on the effect that social media and social networking have had on the music industry. It presents both positive and negative effects on both the fans and the industry, arguing that while social networks have expanded the availability of niche music markets to fans, mass marketing attempts by record companies may alienate fans from the flourishing online social/musical scene. Additionally, the author argues that social networks have broken down the barriers between fans and artists, allowing smaller labels and new artists to distribute their work effectively without spending large sums of money. While the article is not scholarly in nature, its discussion of social networks and their effect on the music industry provides a wonderful background of information for where my professional project and research fit into the modern industry.


This article describes music industry business models before and after the digital revolution in the industry. Additionally, the author addresses the conditions in which artists worked under both modern and traditional business models. The author argues that under traditional industry models, industry structures limited artist creativity. However, in the modern era, artists are able to experience a new level of freedom. This freedom is due to the development of modern business plans and the technological revolution within the industry. Unfortunately, the information in this article is somewhat surface level, but it does provide insight into differences between old and new music industry business models. This information will help guide my research in discovering what low-cost distribution methods are best for emerging artists.

This article focuses on how new technologies have opened up easy lines of communication between musicians and fans within the digitized music industry. Large record and management companies once blocked these lines of communication; however, the decentralization of power has provided artists with easy, cheap, and effective ways to communicate to their fans. This article suggests that artists may no longer need to rely on record companies for distribution and marketing, and provides specific examples of successful artists who broke away from traditional industry business models. While this article mostly discusses well-established artists, their success could provide emerging artists with a model in which they can begin their respective careers. The information within the article provides significant insights into how low cost distribution methods can help musicians and is, therefore, a valuable asset for my research.