

A dark, atmospheric photograph of a DJ performing at a club. The DJ is seen from the back, wearing a black cap and a dark jacket, with their hands on the turntables. The background is filled with the silhouettes of a crowd of people dancing. The overall mood is energetic and professional.

beatport. SOUNDS

How To: Make a Living in the Music Industry

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Successful producers are often a mix of musician, publicist, marketing guru, and accountant – but you'll need all of these skills if you're serious about selling your music, writes Sample Magic's Sharooz



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As obvious as it might sound, many of us forget that we are, in fact, self-contained businesses. Over the course of the past ten years, the music business has shrunk from a huge money-spinning machine to something of a cottage industry and many of today's talents have risen to the top through their own marketing efforts. It's also worth remembering that most of the industry's longest surviving stars have always maintained a firm grip on their own business affairs as well. Of course, it's always more fun to spend time in the studio, but it does no harm to study the mechanisms upon which the industry runs.

Do your research – read up on contracts, deal points, advances, publishing, and so on. At the very least, you'll be less likely to fall foul of a dodgy deal. Being proactive with your own marketing and promotion does no harm either – it's unlikely you'll be discovered if all you do is sit in your studio and wait for the big guns to come calling.

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- **Keep Your Fingers in as Many Pies as Possible**
 - In today's climate, it's getting increasingly difficult to make a living from 'record' sales, alone. Remember that there are many other ways to maximize your income. Music publishing is a thriving industry, so you'll need to catalog your radio plays and public performance income and register with a performing rights society.
 - Look at alternative ways in which you can exploit your tracks – internet radio play, selling music to advertising agencies, writing for video games and TV – even making samples for sample CDs. If you produce dance music, look for DJ or live performance options – perhaps at your own club nights – and look for compilation licensing opportunities (getting your tracks on commercially available mix CDs.) All this will keep you ticking over while you wait for that elusive hit.

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- **Negotiation is Key**
 - If your music, production and marketing are all strong enough, then chances are you'll soon attract the attention of a record label. But what do you do when the contracts start arriving? First up, examine them until you can examine them no more. Then pass them on to someone with a keen legal eye (there are plenty of music law firms that specialize in helping newbies and many that also offer a 'first half hour for free' consultation or similar – just call one and ask.
 - In the UK the Musician's Union also offers a free contract consultancy service.) Don't be scared to negotiate advances and royalty percentages upward. Many companies will have both an opening gambit and closing figure in mind when they approach you and usually a compromise will be reached somewhere in between.
 - At the same time keep a lid on your outgoings by bartering down the prices of services you buy in (mastering costs, studio hire, web design, etc), never forgetting that many of these companies are independent self-employed businesses just like yours.

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- **Keep Your Costs Down & Maximize Your Profits**
 - Once the money starts rolling in, what do you do with it? There's no sense in buying yourself a new car with your first big royalty check. The music business is not geared towards long-term prosperity and there is no guarantee that just because you've had one success more offers will roll in. That's why it pays to invest your money wisely and closely scrutinize every purchase you make. Of course, we all want to enjoy the fruits of our labour – who doesn't? But investing back into your 'business' in the early stages will lead to a much brighter future. There's a good reason why big blue chip companies always hold their cost cutters and finance heads in highest regard.
- **Keep a Close Eye on the Latest Trends**
 - If you're making music to earn cash then – for better or worse – you'll need to keep an eye on what is selling in the marketplace. If your product (that is, your music) sounds stagnant and dated, consumers and label bosses who need to make a living, too won't be lining up to bite. The industry is constantly evolving, so ensure you're on top of what's current: read magazines and blogs, browse MySpace sites, listen to radio stations, go clubbing and try to buy music regularly. This doesn't mean trying to sound like everyone else or keeping up with the zeitgeist just for the sake of it – there's nothing worse than an artist who is constantly trying to keep up with cool – but keeping abreast of current trends will ensure that you don't get ignored or left behind by the masses.

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- 5 Day-toDay Rules That Will Help Lead to Success

1. If all else fails, don't be afraid to take a part-time job – You're not giving up on your dream or selling out to a 9-5 – you're just making it easier to facilitate your career by bringing in some income to pay the bills or buy equipment.
2. Stay grounded – If fame and fortune does come thick and fast, keep your feet on the ground. Everyone prefers to work with a nice guy. There's an old maxim that says "All the people you meet on the way up, you'll meet on the way down." There's never been a truer word spoken. Leave your ego at the door – of the studio, the record label office, the accountants – and have a positive, friendly attitude and you'll never be short of people to work with.
3. Don't fool yourself – When making new tracks, seek the opinions of others as often as you can. Form a circle of the 'trusted few' – individuals who you think are qualified to comment on your music and who you can rely on for feedback as-and-when you need it. Listen to their advice: it's always hard to take criticism, but if you're your only fan then you'll be your only buyer.

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4. Keep supply up – In days of old when music publishers signed musicians off the back of an impromptu, on-the-spot audition (this actually did used to happen!), they would commission their new investment to write a certain number of songs a week. Not all of these songs would be released, of course – they just wanted to make sure that there was plenty of practice going into landing that golden-egg bestseller. As a producer, making tracks as often as you can means you'll be improving and maximizing your chances of getting the ideal track to shop.
5. Stay motivated – It's hard to stay focused at times and incredibly easy to lose your way. When you're working on a track, learn to shut out external factors. This not as easy as it sounds, of course – we all have personal lives and commitments – but studio sessions are rarely productive if all our time is spent thinking about things other than music. If you're getting distracted, turn off the phone and quit your email. Write down your goals and your motivations and keep them close-by. When you're flagging and wondering why the hell you're wasting all your time in your bedroom or a windowless studio, look at your list of motivations and take strength from them.

Sharooz is a DJ, producer and partner in [Sample Magic](#). He has sold over 60,000 records with his tracks regularly played on Radio 1, figuring in the playlists of Pete Tong, David Guetta, Roger Sanchez, and many more. He also writes for EMI Music Publishing, Universal Production Music and regularly DJs across the UK and Europe.

