Introduction

This is a fairly technical-minded document of specific, actionable steps or references for how you can develop your music marketing as an independent artist. For a more holistic or abstracted understanding of our approach, check out our YouTube channel and our free course on marketing for indie artists.

This PDF is part of our set of free resources to help independent artists build their career. For more resources, [visit the resources page on our website](#).

Defining Your Brand, Message, and Goals

To define your brand, create the following starting assets:

- [ ] A mood board showing your visual language
- [ ] An audience avatar
- [ ] A chosen artist type or combination of two

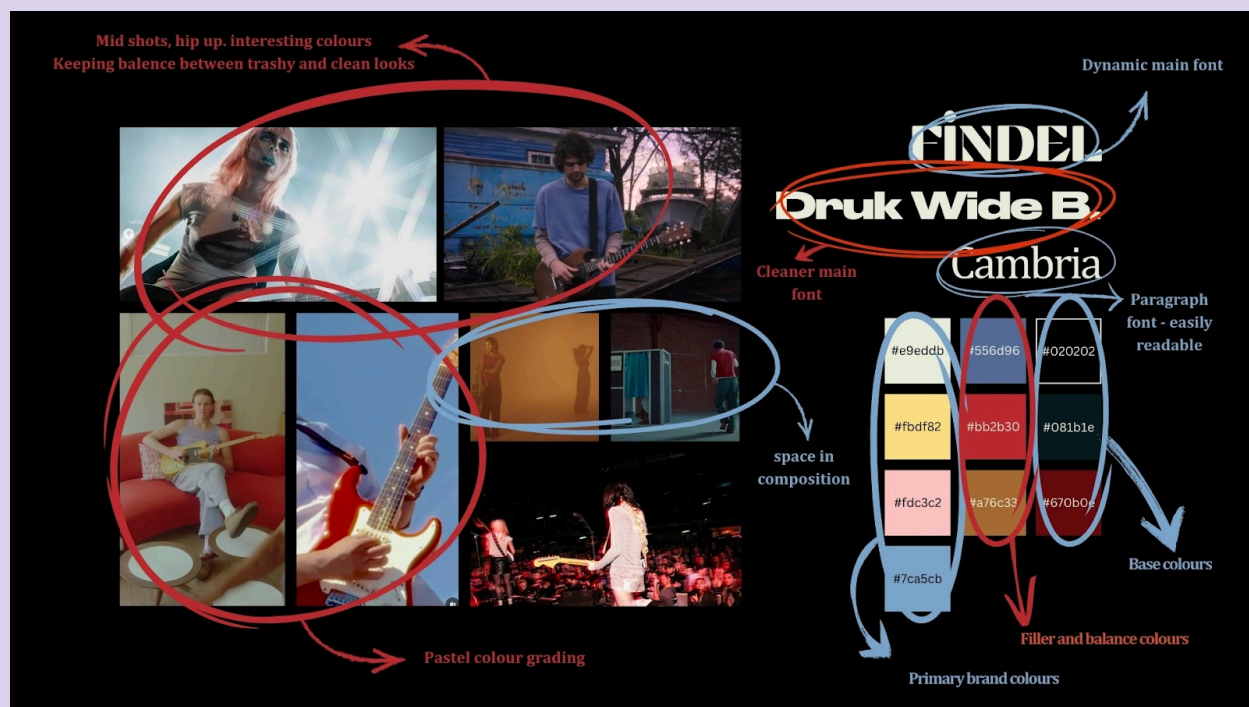And the following assets, influenced by the above:

- [ ] A language guide
- [ ] A set of references
- [ ] A set of formats to start testing

Your Mood Board

To make sure your mood board is really effective it should include

- [ ] A stylistic font, a paragraph font, and a clean font for titles that need to be easy to read
- [ ] Colours for backgrounds, mid-ranges, and highlights. This should inspire your sets, outfits, videography, and colour grading for your video work
- [ ] Camera angles you like
- [ ] Stills that show a use of space and framing that you like

Here are three examples from different artists

Mid shots, hip up. interesting colours
Keeping balence between trashy and clean looks

Dynamic main font

FINDEL

Druk Wide B.

Cleaner main font

Cambria

Paragraph font - easily readable

#e9eddb   #556d96   #020202

#fbdf82   #bb2b30   #081b1e

#fdc3c2   #a76c33   #670b0e

space in composition

#7ca5cb

Base colours

Pastel colour grading

Filler and balance colours

Primary brand colours

SABA LOU MOOD BOARD

Framing styles:
below eyes perspective

Lighting:
Lots of shadows, not so dark

Title font

ROSEMONT

Springfield LT Reg.

Goudy Bold

Alt Font

#f4d686   #8db2de   #180206

#f98f1a   #9a6544   #412b17

#d44d37   #68a166   #6b7953

Paragraph font

#bd7acb

Base/background colours

Warm colours with blue balance

Filler and balance colours

Primary brand colours

Software: To design this, we recommend Canva (sorry designers). It's free and easy to use for beginners. It does have limits to design but honestly if you're not a professional it's more than enough.

Resources: To find images, pinterest and eyecannndy. To find fonts, Google Fonts and WhatTheFont, To find colours, imagecolorpicker.com and Coolors.

Pro tip: as you do preproduction and editing on videos, have this next to you or on your desktop so you can reference it throughout. If you're making anything visual, having it exported as a non-flattened pdf is super useful so you can copy and paste the colour hex values into your design software.

Your Audience Avatar

There are two types of information about your audience to consider: demographics and psychographics. Demographics are the physical descriptors of your audience and psychographics are a description of who your audience is. Ideally, you should fill out all of the following characteristics:

Demographics:
- ☐ Age
- ☐ Gender
- ☐ Location
- ☐ Language
- ☐ Profession or Studies
- ☐ Education Level
- ☐ Nationality

Psychographics:
- ☐ What are their most common challenges in life?
- ☐ What are their most common needs?

☐ What do they think about music, marketing, and culture?
☐ What are they interested in?
☐ What are their hobbies?

Here are some examples of audience avatars we've used for artists:

Emetres:

Age - 26
Location - BER
Education Level - Bachelor
Most common challenges - relationships, family, interior design, cooking
Needs and complaints - friendship, good food and music, nice concerts and entertainment
Opinions on marketing, music, culture - music is fun, lighthearted and it's vibes
Gender - women
Job - 9to5 in people-oriented corporate (office manager, HR, etc.)
Nationality - Venezuelan, Mexican
Interests - plants, dogs, nice art objects like vintage radios, furniture, reading, fashion

Note: we are no longer working with Emetres as of writing this document. This is because the project ended but going back through her profiles you can see examples of our work.

Efro:

Age - 23
Location - BER
Education Level - Student
Most common challenges - love, lust, not so serious more chilling
Needs and complaints - figuring things out, crush
Opinions on marketing, music, culture - setting a vibe, more solitary listening
Gender - women
Job - unemployed
Nationality - California, French
Interests - Surfing, Snowboarding, Skateboarding, Films, Festivals

It's important to understand what these avatars are. This is in no way meant to limit who your music is for or who can enjoy it. Neither is it an individual you are looking for. These are profiles for someone who would definitely love your music. When you're deciding on a caption, editing a video, or putting together an event, this is where you look and ask yourself, "would this person love this?". If the answer is no, you're going astray from your messaging and feelings.

This avatar is ever-changing, as your music will too, but within a given project, if you're constantly wanting to change your avatar, your project is probably scattered and lacking cohesion.

Software: Any note taking software, we use Google Docs.

Resources: None needed.

Pro tip: Don't spend a bunch of time here. It should be a 15 minute job maximum. If you think of an answer to one of the categories then doubt it, just put it and move on - your instinct was probably right.

Your Artist Type

There are four artist archetypes that we use at Las Aguas to orient ourselves: the worldbuilder, the musician, the songwriter, and the performer. No successful artist is all 4 and that is ok - and no one is better than another.

The Worldbuilder is an artist that has their focus a little off the music - their presence includes multimedia projects: shortfilms, clothing and style, music videos, scripts. There are often characters and concept albums as the centrepiece for drops or eras. Examples of this would be A$AP Rocky, Tyler, The Creator, Childish Gambino, or David Bowie.

The Musician is an artist that studies music and instrumental skills above all else - they usually have smaller audiences and are virtuosic in their craft. Examples of this would be Thundercat, Radiohead, or Tame Impala. Outside of the music, there's not much to look at.

The Songwriter is an artist who is about the pencraft and poetry, communicating emotion and personality through their lyrics and connecting on a personal basis rather than a vision or impressive skill. Examples of this are Taylor Swift, Loyle Carner, and Medium Build.

The Performer lives in the live show - this isn't so much the virtuoso performance like Sílvia Pérez Cruz but the lights, dance, and graphics of Beyoncé or Dua Lipa. Honestly for indie artists this is hard to pull off because of the inherent cost of show elements like professional dancers or custom lighting.

The best way to think of this is to choose two - a primary one that guides your focus throughout a project and a secondary one that fills out the personality behind the primary. You can often see this in artists. For example, Beyoncé is a performer first then a musician second, with her vocal skills as a part of her public image, Taylor Swift is a songwriter first and performer second, and Tyler, The Creator is a worldbuilder first with musician second.

If you can't pick two, the idea you are trying to communicate to potential audience members is likely too complicated. This isn't to restrict the project, but to clarify messaging. If you're not sure which you fall into, here's a table that might help:

First → Second ↓	Worldbuilder	Musician	Songwriter	Performer
Worldbuilder	x	You're focussed on your album first, then communicating it visually	Lyrics are the most important thing and you use them to tell visceral stories	You build a stage to perfect your set, an album is an excuse to go on tour, and just guitar and vocals would never achieve what you want
Musician	You love music but at the end of the day learning the perfect technique is just a un-skippable means to an end of creating the feeling you're communicating	x	With no visuals and no live show, your project is still 95% of the way there. Your musical abilities are a way to support your lyrics.	Everything is probably done live on stage but if it can't be, the show must go on and the spectacle is king.
Songwriter	Your music videos probably have	You probably struggle to create	x	Most of your studio time is

	dialogue or monologue, your songs are character driven, and	a visual project and the album cover is the last thing you think about. You just want to be in the studio playing instruments and making songs.		spent bringing to life the stories behind your music and the rest of your time is spent rehearsing and planning your shows.
Performer	It doesn't matter if you write the music or play any instruments, your project is about the concept and the show is the first extension of that.	Live shows are your favourite because it's a chance to show off your skills and enter the zone.	You perform to tell stories, shows are about connecting with your fans but it doesn't stop with music, you go into the outfits, choreography, sets, etc.	x

Reactive Assets: A Language Guide

Now you know who you're making music for and you have the basic structure of your image, it's time to focus on details.

To create a language guide, consider the following areas:

- ☐ Writing complexity - generally leaning simple here is good for reaching a wider audience
- ☐ Grammar - do you care about punctuation or are the marks that you like to use?
- ☐ Emotional versus factual language - what vocabulary choices fit your audience avatar
- ☐ Keywords - are there words that you can turn to when you're stuck on how to write

For Example: This document is written in simple English because we don't want to specifically eliminate people that don't have english as a foreign language or don't have higher education. The grammar is largely correct as we want to convey professionality but it's not perfect because we care far more about the content and that everything is understood than it's "correctness". I'm mostly using factual language because the goal here is to give information, not illicit an emotional reaction. We use a few keywords that are important for communicating or simplifying potentially complicated concepts: independent artists (rather than specifying emerging artists, artists without publishing, etc.), assets (instead of photos, videos, etc.), or marketing (instead of differing with promotion since they are similar buckets and, in our system, we believe all promotion is marketing in its secondary purpose).

Pro Tip: Lot's of artists write to their audience as a group, in second person plural. This is usually a mistake on lots of levels - it can leave the reader feeling less looked after than direct speech and it can often feel like you are being insincere, talking to a mass of fans that likely aren't the audience watching since so many of the people that see your material are people discovering you for the first time. The time to use this might be in thanks to an audience for a show or interacting together - note that all of these are inherently collective actions, not taken in isolation.

Reactive Assets: References

This is probably the easiest part of this document - when you see something cool, save it in a consistent place - whether that's an IG saved folder or a notes page with a 100 links. A general rule here - the better everything is organised, the more useful it is.

Reactive Assets: Formats for Testing

Choose a few different styles of content you want to play with - ideally not just copying the content but looking at the basic structure and pulling it across to your artist project. [Here is a deck of content types and short descriptions](#) - we regularly update this deck with new content types that we're working with so it might be worth saving the link somewhere.

What's the Right Approach for Your Goal?

Keeping it simple, there are two things that always work well: consistent posting on social media and doing live shows. That being said, here are a few common goals we see with artists at Las Aguas and how they shift our strategy.

Playing more shows

It is vital to have videos of your live shows, an EPK, a tech rider, and a functioning website
Instagram and YouTube are the place for you to get reach that converts to tickets
Mailing lists are vital since this consistently has the highest conversion to purchases
Have a videographer cover your shows so people who might be interested in your music can see what your shows are like
Of course, play incredible shows

Spending more time in the studio

Look for collaborations for shows or content
Look at Patreon or Substack - your studio time, if used efficiently, can result in lots of easy BTS content that fans can pay for
Get more creative with your social media, making visualisers or music videos. Only posting studio footage can be boring
Film everything you can in the studio without it hurting your process, this can turn into content that can reach hundreds of thousands of fans as well as long-form documentary-style pieces for your rollout

Reaching your right audience (e.g. languages)

Social media is your number one friend
Post only in the language of your audience avatar
Post videos that involve the culture of your target audience
Differentiate people who understand your work with niche offers that lead to mailing list signups, that way you can directly contact the people who are in your right audience and be more conscious about who you interact with at shows, for example

Grow Listenership

Short form social media and ads are the easiest and most cost-efficient way to grow this
Understand what about your content works on different platforms and ary your presence accordingly

Sell Merch

Develop a visual identity through short form video
Make long-format videos that go into the creative decisions behind your merch
Constantly push people towards your mailing list

Levels of Marketing Management

Level 1: Learning

Just post once a week, AB test your content by using trial reels or posting a few weeks apart on youtube and tiktok, dedicate 1 day a month to filming content and do regular low-level shows.

Here's what your monthly schedule should look like to consistently get through level 1. Once you've maintained this for 3 months, it might be time to look at level 2.

MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
Film Short Form Content (2 hours)	Open Mic	Post				
		Post				
	Open Mic	Post		Admin - update links, send a newsletter		
		Post				
Look at what worked, plan your next shoot	Open Mic	Post				

For resources on managing this, [check out our resources page here](#).

Level 2: Practicing

Once you've got level one down, up the frequency, try posting 3 times a week and filming a couple times a week - maybe one of these is a show. If you're doing this, it's worth starting to track what's working and what's not working. Start sending people to sign up to your newsletter and message them every once and a while.

Here's what your monthly schedule should look like to consistently get through level 2. Once you've maintained this for 3 months, it might be time to look at level 3.

MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
Film Short Form Content (2 hours)	Carousel Post	Show	Post Short Form Video			Post Short Form Video
	Post Short Form Video		Post Short Form Video		Send a Newsletter (45 mins)	Post Short Form Video
	Carousel Post	Show (Filmed)	Post Short Form Video			Post Short Form Video
Admin Day (3 hours)	Post Short Form Video		Newsletter Promo Carousel			Post Short Form Video
Look at what worked, plan your next shoot	Post Short Form Video					

For more information on making a great newsletter that's formatted right and won't end up in your audience's spam, check out our series of educational videos on YouTube and subscribe to not miss the upcoming episode on newsletters and mailing lists.

Level 3: Amateur

Do everything from the last two steps but start to experiment with other, more difficult, promotions: cold contacting radio stations and cultural news sites, messaging bands for opening slots, make quarterly sales offers, and track your customer LTV. This is probably the stage where you want to start looking for help.

Here's what your monthly schedule should look like to consistently get through level 3. Once you've maintained this for 3 months, it might be time to look at level 4 and bring on some team members.

MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
Business Analysis - CAC:LTV, Marketing Review	Film Form Content (2 hours) Carousel Post	Show	Edit Videos Post Short Form Video			Post Short Form Video
	Post Short Form Video		Post Short Form Video		Send a Newsletter (45 mins)	Post Short Form Video
	Cold Contact Tastemakers (3 hours) Carousel Post	Show (Filmed)	Post Long Form Video to YouTube	Edit Show Videos		Post Short Form Video
	Admin Day (3 hours) Newsletter Promo Carousel	Send a Newsletter with Sales Offer	Promote Your Sales Offer			Post Short Form Video
Look at what worked, plan your next shoot	Post Short Form Video					

How to measure LTV: Track each customer's transactions and see how much your average customer is worth. This is extremely valuable to understanding how to budget shows and marketing.

Level 4: Pro

All of the other three levels plus daily posting, varying your posts per platform to fit what works there, dedicate a day every month just to admin and networking, start running meta ads, and check your CAC:LTV ratio. Honestly, if you're here, you probably don't need to be reading this document.

Setting Up Your Website

We are often asked by artists that we are talking to about working together, "does it actually matter having a website?". It's a valid question because most people never go and visit artists' website but our answer is always yes for the following reasons:

1) It is an opportunity for creative expression that can reach a new audience in itself
2) It is a resource for potential press and bookers to use for efficiently finding information
3) It provides you the opportunity to positively affect how search results show information about you and your projects
4) It allows you to collect user data that would otherwise be hidden behind a LinkTree paywall
5) It allows you to run meta ads efficiently for not just streaming, but anything else you are working to promote
6) If you want, it can act as a way to gather revenue in itself, whether through a webstore or gated content - acting like a fully personalisable version of Patreon
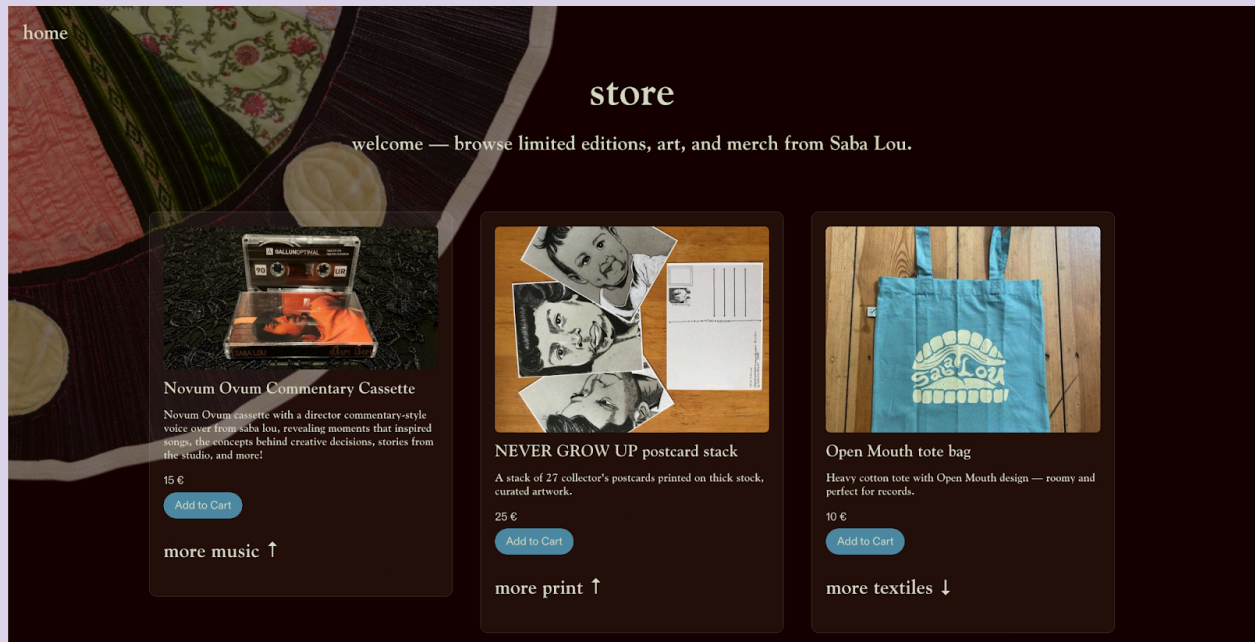
What makes a great website

The websites where we have seen the most success are genuinely creative and honestly quite hard to make without coding experience or at least being ready to get into it. Your website should be an extension of your art, with every detail communicating something thought through. Also, it should be

exciting to use - there are no rules and there's nobody that you need to impress with professionality. If your website is interesting enough, it will be shared around and talked about. On the extreme end of this is [CORP.'s website](#) - they were the first client we worked with and their lead vocalist is also a software engineer so we worked together to build a site inspired by early Windows.
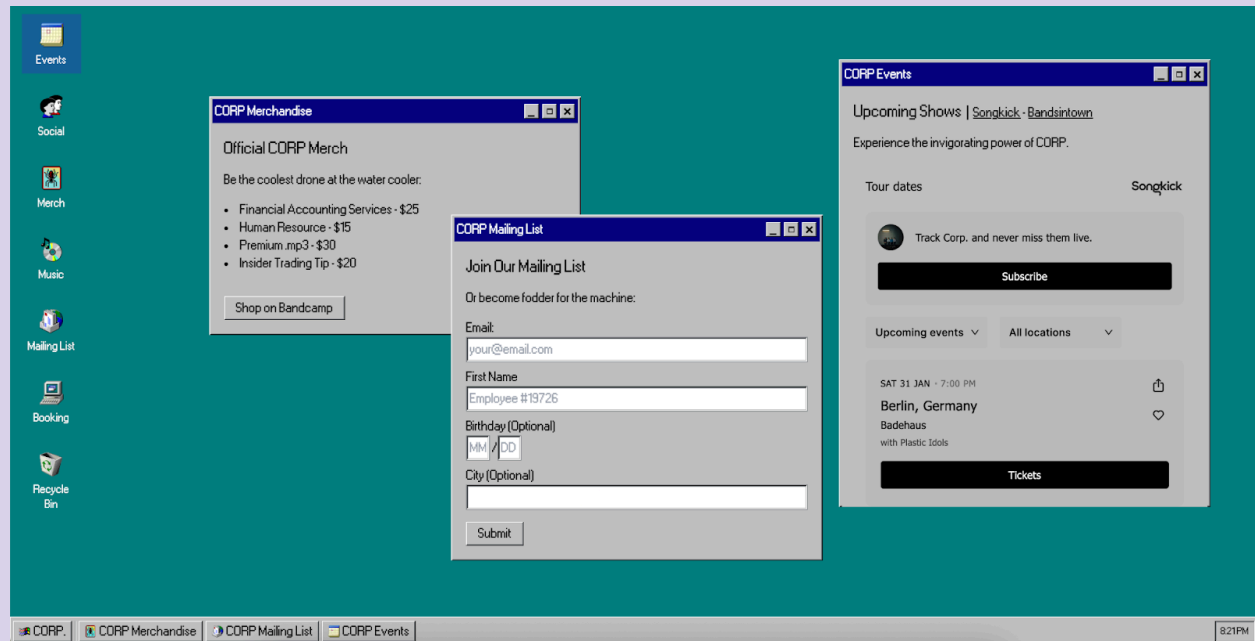
Similarly but far less complicated to make is Saba Lou's website. It has elements that mirror the natural world, with the homepage featuring a moon that follows the actual mood phases and the store featuring a quilt made by Saba Lou that rotates throughout the year, following the seasons. For both of these sites, we saw an increase across stats when the sites were posted about and have received messages from fans talking about the site.

store

welcome — browse limited editions, art, and merch from Saba Lou.

Novum Ovum Commentary Cassette

Novum Ovum cassette with a director commentary-style voice over from saba lou, revealing moments that inspired songs, the concepts behind creative decisions, stories from the studio, and more!

15 €

Add to Cart

more music ↑

NEVER GROW UP postcard stack

A stack of 27 collector's postcards printed on thick stock, curated artwork.

25 €

Add to Cart

more print ↑

Open Mouth tote bag

Heavy cotton tote with Open Mouth design — roomy and perfect for records.

10 €

Add to Cart

more textiles ↓

If you are really trying to get into website building and exploring what you can make digitally, locking into the network effect is invaluable. The network effect is when a product (e.g. an app or website) becomes more valuable to the user if they share it with friends. The most famous example of this is of course Facebook - the app is essentially useless if noone you know uses it. Other examples could be multiplayer games or cryptocurrencies. There are two routes to making use of this concept in your music career, one is in offers and the other in entertainment.

In offers, you can do two-for-one tickets for events, incentivising fans to bring a friend to an event, making the experience better.

In entertainment, you can integrate all sorts of network effects into your website - simple games is the easiest to think of but, taking inspiration from this Milka marketing move, you can make something need two users to unlock a hidden part of your site, e.g. a puzzle that needs to be solved simultaneously on different computers.

Pro Tip: Great websites are ones that are easy to find. It's worth hiring a professional to sort out your SEO (or increasingly trendy GEO but beware of scams here). If you have no budget and are ready to get into code, install the Claude chrome extension and have it put together a plan for SEO improvement for you.

What makes a good website

A good website is much easier to make code-free. There are plenty of platforms that help you do this and honestly the bar of average artist websites is pretty terrible. The key to a good website is understanding who is visiting it and what they want. Typically, there are 3 reasons people go to a website:

1) Research - people from press or writing academic work just want quick and accurate information.
2) Passing Through - audience members trying to find some other part of your digital presence, e.g. coming from IG and looking for your music on their streaming platform of choice
3) Connecting Deeper - fans who want to buy merch or tickets, or want to see what else you are doing

A common mistake here is that artists don't usually visit other artists' pages so don't understand why anyone else would. There are lots of different ways that audiences and professionals interact with artists online, even if some seem ridiculous to you. Remember: someone somewhere is asking twitter questions instead of googling and someone else is finding out about a newly discovered song by using their alexa.

Pro Tip: The most valuable space on your website is the landing page and none of the above users are visiting without knowing that you have music out. DO NOT waste this landing page with a "new song out now" text, try to use it to push people to where they want to go - the webstore or a mailing list sign up, for example.

Research

This is the easiest, have a press page available via your main menu that includes:

- [ ] An EPK
- [ ] A tech rider
- [ ] A portfolio
- [ ] A bio
- [ ] Press texts about each of your releases

Also have an EPK pdf download link in the footer of your site.

Passing Through

Have a simple menu that is clear to open. Have a links page that looks like a linktree that has all your relevant links and make sure you have meta pixels installed. Include links to all platforms - Spotify holds 60% market share in the west but there are full regions that don't use it and even though Apple Music holds much less share, every stream pays double.

Connecting Deeper

Have your newsletter sign-up incredibly accessible - ideally on the homepage and a separate page.

Set up a webstore. If you have no merch, come up with something ridiculously expensive and have it there - a home concert is great for this. Then try to fill out the rest with a couple of different price levels.

The more interactive, the parts of your site that are built for this user profile, the better.

Pro Tip: Go to Tidal on desktop and share the music from there - it will create a link that shows all streaming platforms. If you share your distributor link, this may change over time and when you change distributor, it will be a dead link. Going back years to find dead links is not fun.

Recommended Hosting Platforms

Mailing List: [Mailchimp](#)

Website Hosting: [Cargo](#) for creativity (also a great mailing list), [Wordpress](#) for ease of use, avoid Wix and Bandzoogle because there is very little flexibility or space to grow in my opinion.

Buying a URL: If you're hosting on cargo, cargo. If you're hosting elsewhere, [Namecheap](#). Namecheap will save you a few euros a year but it can be a little complicated to move your hosting to another platform.

Pro Tip: A website definitely isn't the first thing you should hire someone for but it is where it will save you the most time. Content, production, and strategy are much more useful early on while you have a basic website but having a professional deal with it will return one of the biggest changes in quality of any part of your project.

Extra: Making the Most of Your Work (For Free)

While this isn't about your branding, it helps to not waste your time and money. Here are our recommendations for optimising how you're working.

As always, the more team members and specialists you can bring on, the less of your time will go to waste. For example, think of a live gig. If you are doing everything on your own you can probably find a friend to man the merch table and someone to take some videos. If you work with a merch designer and a videographer, that gig can be worth much more money and a month's work of social media content, all while delivering a better experience because you can better focus on the show itself. That being said, here are a few free or low-cost ways to massively increase your ROI on parts of your artist project.

Shoot days:

Check what is working on your social media
Plan by location and make a shot list
Plan the colours, angles, and use references at every step
Check the weather on that day
Batch shoot lots of videos in one day and don't post them all at once, spread them out until you know you will have more
Always film BTS footage and take pictures of the shooting

Gigs:

Film rehearsals - not only can you watch back your performances to improve, but this can be used for "before and after" style content
Always have a paper mailing list signup form at the merch table or, if you don't have merch, at the door
Have merch available, even if it's just a couple things that are hand made
Have someone film the gig and plan the parts of songs you know work best on social media

The ideal camera set up looks like this:
2 static cameras, filming in vertical (maybe in horizontal for a couple songs that don't work so well on short form)
At least one camera moving around throughout the set, getting action shots and moving between band members for key moments

Studio Time:

Rehearse and practice ahead of time, if you've never worked in a professional studio before, maybe hire a vocal coach or a producer to work with you for a half a day so you can learn how to position yourself for mics, respond to take notes, get used to hearing yourself on headphones, etc.

Set up a tripod and let it roll, this really isn't invasive and can result in great marketing material
Try to get the project files once the project is over - there might be great unused takes that could make interesting BTS content or remixes in the future

Merch:

Sign limited copies, this can easily add 30% to the price and costs nothing
Put 10 minutes into creating an interesting offer, not just announcing that something is available
If you're stuck on offers, [check out this free pdf of 20 offers for every major year-end holiday season for inspiration](#)

Releases:

Consider bringing on someone with experience, this is complicated and doing it right can change everything (and contact them at least 8 weeks before the first release of the campaign)
Have all your marketing assets ready before uploading your first track and upload at least 6 weeks before release