

Celtic Musicians' Guide to Digital Music

Quick, actionable tips on how to promote your music with the Irish
& Celtic Music Podcast and other places online.

By Marc Gunn

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INTRODUCTION

The music business has changed. CD sales as well as digital sales are dropping. People are streaming music more and more.

Thank goodness we play Celtic music! We're safe here.

I joke but it's kind of true. Celtic music fans are older. Many are still buying CDs. Compare the Spotify streams of Dropkick Murphys or Flogging Molly and you will see something interesting. Younger people are streaming music. They aren't buying it.

Our audience is disappearing!

I don't know about you, but I'm a bit worried. I used to sell 1000 copies of the first printing of my CDs in under a year. No longer.

I have 3000 CDs in my office. I don't know if they will ever sell.

It's time to change with the times. We can not afford not to. We have to adapt.

My goal in publishing this ebook is to help you, my fellow Celtic musicians, to adjust with the time. If we work together, we can have a HUGE impact on the music world at large, our fellow Celtic musicians, and our own music careers as well.

ONE CAVEAT

I should point out. There are many paths you can take in your own music career. This plan works for me. If it doesn't work for you. That's okay. Hopefully, at the very least, you'll get some ideas to push your own music career forward.

WHERE TO START

We're gonna start our digital music education with the Irish & Celtic Music Podcast. This is my flagship "radio" show where I promote Celtic music and musicians. You will learn how to promote yourself with my podcast, but also use the same techniques to promote your music to other podcasts, internet radio programs, blogs, playlists and more.

I started the Irish & Celtic Music Podcast because I wanted to help independent Celtic musicians like myself. I don't have record label support or a publicist. I had trouble getting my

music heard. Maybe it wasn't good enough. Maybe it wasn't "Celtic" enough. Whatever the case, it wasn't being heard. I decided to use my podcast and Celtic Music Magazine to promote my music.

It didn't take long for me to realize that I love helping musicians. Most don't enjoy music marketing as much as I do. I could help people!

MUSIC DISCOVERY

The Celtic Music Magazine originally shared free MP3s and reviewed albums. The Irish & Celtic Music Podcast took it a step further. I played music from bands who couldn't get radio play with Thistle & Shamrock or other local Celtic radio shows. I made it easy for your music to be heard.

Meanwhile, I grew the listeners of the podcast. I educated them. I told them, if you love the music, buy it!

Over the past 17 years, I've had hundreds of emails from podcast fans saying, I bought this track or that CD, or I saw the band finally and heard them on your show.

It works!

The podcast is a brilliant music discovery tool. I successfully connected tens of thousands of people to new musicians and bands. The show has been downloaded 5 million times (IAB Stats). It's incredible.

When I finally started looking at Spotify at the end of 2017, I realized I had a competition problem. The Irish & Celtic Music Podcast and Spotify are both music discovery services. In fact, Spotify is probably a nicer experience than a podcast. You can easily add your favorite songs to your music library.

I spent the start of 2018 trying to figure out how I could get my music heard more on Spotify.

But the podcast...?

To use the podcast, you have to go to the show notes to look up a song and band you enjoyed. It takes some work. But if you do, you are sold!

It took some soul searching. Yes, Spotify is a competitor but what makes the Irish & Celtic Music Podcast so successful is that it's not about me. It's about what is best for the artists I feature.

Spotify may not be the best way to get your music heard right now. But streaming music will be.

I want to help you get ready for that day.

I'm gonna guide you through how to get your music on my podcast which is useful for all podcasts, and how to get noticed. Then I'll offer tools and suggestions on how you can improve your internet presence to sell more music, merch, and get more folks following you on Spotify.

Let's get started.

SUBMIT MUSIC TO PODCASTS, INCLUDING MINE

I'm gonna start with how and why you should submit your music to the Irish & Celtic Music Podcast. I'm doing this for two reasons.

First, I'm a podcaster. My original goal with this book was to help Celtic musicians get included in my podcast and to answer your frequently asked questions.

The second reason is that my podcast is a good example for you to extrapolate what other podcasters or radio DJs might need to submit to their shows.

Yes. Every show is different. We all have our formats and formulas. If you want to be a part of our shows, you need to understand why and how we do stuff.

I remember when I first submitted my music to radio programs and heard nothing back. I was confused. Later, I was angry. Why wouldn't they play MY music? Now I understand.

So as you read these sections below, think about how other shows might include you and how you can become their favorite.

I DON'T WANT YOUR CDS

It costs \$5-10 to compile and mail a CD and press kit to the media. That's a lot of money for some musicians, especially early on in our careers.

When I became a media person, I got press kits. Quite often, I just tossed them. I am interested in music first. The story comes later.

That's why I went completely digital in 2016. I no longer accept CDs. And as a special note, my computer doesn't have a CD player.

I should point out. I am still an anomaly in the music business though. Most DJs as of 2023 still want CDs.

I WANT YOUR MP3s!

Ideally, they should be 128 kbps, stereo, and they should include ID3 tags. That means when I download your MP3s and drag them into iTunes, your name, album, and song title will show up.

To send me your music, you can email the MP3s individually. But there's a better method—Google Drive (or Dropbox, WeTransfer, or as a zip file on your website).

You can send your music to me at celticpodcast@gmail.com

This is what I like to get if you're getting ready to release new music. Otherwise, I usually buy your music so that I can better support the artists in the show.

INCLUDE THEMES IN ID3 TAGS

This is a trick I learned from someone who licenses music to TV shows. If you want to get extra points and possibly extra play on my podcast, include keyword themes in the comments section of the ID3 tags.

Every year, I do an "Irish drinking songs" show. You'll hear "Earth Day" music, or "Christmas songs". These are things you can count on.

It's a challenge putting together those shows. Sometimes I search for "trees" or "drinking" or "christmas" or "winter", there are only a few songs that really fit those titles. Ultimately, I have to use my knowledge of the artists and their songs to pick music for the show. But there's an easier way.

For that matter, you can also add production information to each MP3. Who performed on the song? Who produced it? What instruments are on the song, etc? The more information, the better.

Imagine if YOU put additional tag information in each track from your album. You could list "fiddle", "bodhran", "drinking", "workout" and other keywords in the Comments section of your ID3 tags.

The next time I search for one of those keywords, *your* track will show up. That means you get an extra chance to be heard on the podcast... or to have your music licensed.

HERE'S HOW I SHARE MY DIGITAL MUSIC WITH THE MEDIA

I create a folder on Google Drive. I uploaded all my MP3s (with ID3 tags added), album covers, and liner notes into it. Now I can easily share that link with the media. Those are always available.

Here's a step-by-step list of what I do for each album:

1. Create a folder for your album. Name it "Your Band - Your Album".
2. Create a folder "Your Band - Your Album - WAV"
3. Create a folder "Your Band - Your Album - 320 kbps MP3"
4. Create a folder "Your Band - Your Album - Assets"
5. Upload all of this to a Google Drive.

Your "Assets" folder contains any promo material and liner notes, including: album covers, band photos, biography, press release, podcasts you're featured on, videos or links to videos where they can see you perform, etc".

Fill it up and make it easy for media people to learn more about you. Then copy that link and send it to a media person.

This works for many digital DJs.

Pretty simple, huh?

You can do that for your own media kit.

SADLY, ROYALTIES ARE NOT PAID

There's something you need to know about podcasts. You can send MP3s all day long, but unless you complete the permission form, I can't play it.

That's because I cannot pay royalties for music played on my podcast.

Music played on podcasts follow the same rules as for mechanical royalties. In the USA, that means 9.1 cents per download. The podcast gets 10,000-20,000 downloads per episode. If I were to pay royalties, I would need to pay a minimum of \$900 per episode. That is not financially feasible.

Yes. The show does have patrons who support the production of the podcast. But they do not bring in enough money to pay the minimum, let alone for hundreds of episodes. It just can't be done at present.

Donations: This is the reason I buy the music. It's also why I donate 10% of all Patreon income to Celtic nonprofits. My hope is that I can do some good for the Celtic community too. I've donated over \$45,000 through Patreon and Celtic compilations I have released.

COMPLETE THE PERMISSION FORM

To have your music featured, you will need to give me permission to play your music. Through it, you will waive your right to being paid mechanical royalties through the podcast.

You just need to complete the Google Form at 4celts.com to give me permission.

You also need to re-complete that permission form every few years. It lets me know about new releases. But you should email me whenever you release new music.

The form is short. It also helps me connect you to music fans. So please complete the entire form. It takes under 2 minutes.

RE: COVER SONGS AND PODSAFE MUSIC

Just because you pay mechanical royalties for a song, does not mean that I can play your recording.

“Caledonia” was written by Dougie MacLean. If I play your recording of “Caledonia”, I will have to pay him royalties.

Because of that, I *try* not to play any cover songs. They are NOT what is called “Podsafe”.

If you have express permission from the songwriter giving you full rights to a cover, I might play it, but please make sure you have those full rights and that songwriter understands they will not get paid either.

Traditional songs and tunes are allowed. If you don't know the author, that's okay too. I'm pretty good at detecting cover songs and removing them from play. But errors will happen.

Just do me a favor and try to suggest music that is only Podsafe. This will be the same for any podcast you want your music played on.

GETTING NOTICED ON THE PODCAST

If you have multiple albums, it helps to submit one form per album. You can do that all at once, but there's a better way.

Wait a month or two and submit your second album.

Or after you get played on the podcast, submit your second album.

This puts your name in my mind a little more frequently. It gives you another reason to be featured.

Submit lots of music. The more music you send me, the more likely you will be played.

For some episodes, I hit random play on iTunes. I skip until I find tracks I like or want to share. The more music you send me, the more likely you will be played on the show.

You can record audio on your phone and email that to me. Say what you think of the podcast or to introduce a song. It's a nice touch.

Subscribe to the mailing list and stay in touch. Drop me an email every now and then to let me know what you're doing or where you are gigging. I love to share videos in the newsletter as well.

I think it's a safe bet that you can do all of these things for any podcast, blog, or radio program. Stay in touch with the host. It makes a difference!

WHO GETS PLAYED?

I play at least one track from nearly every artist who submits music.

If you have instrumental tunes, then you're more likely to get extra features. That's because I receive more vocal music than instrumentals.

WHAT DOESN'T GET PLAYED?

This is a family show so no explicit lyrics.

I'm not a fan of Celtic New Age, especially if there are synthesizers. You probably won't be played.

Though if you play the harp and have that ethereal sound like Loreena McKennitt, submit away. I might play it.

Just because you are from Ireland or Scotland, that doesn't mean you will be played. There needs to be something "Celtic" about the music, besides your nationality. Perhaps it's sung in Gaelic, has traditional themes, or includes traditional instruments.

I do play Celtic Rock on the show. But it still needs to be "Celtic".

This is all open to interpretation. So if you think your music is Celtic, submit it. I'll see if I think it fits the show's format.

The recording quality doesn't have to be perfect. If you have a great live performance, I might play it even if the quality of the recording is poor. But I do prefer good quality sound recordings.

Tuning issues. I am a musician. So if the music is out of tune or the artist is pitchy, I might not play it.

That doesn't mean I won't play your music on the podcast later. Maybe I'll play more songs from your next album.

I think about one band who submitted music when the podcast started. It was okay. I didn't care for it much. The next album was better.

The third album was *really* good! Now they are one of my favorite bands on the podcast. It only took 5+ years.

So keep submitting music. I want to share it and hear you improve!

INTERACTING ON FACEBOOK

Every time I publish the Irish & Celtic Music Podcast, I tag each artist on Facebook.

Facebook sucks for artist pages. But this is a good way to find out if you were played. Then you can tell your fans in your own newsletter if you are so inclined.

If you share the post on Facebook, I'd love it if you tagged the podcast as well.

If you can get your fans talking about you on a post, that always makes me notice you more.

Oh! And I don't really use my personal page on Facebook. I do everything through my podcast page or my own fan page. So tag the podcast page, not me.

FIND AND GROW YOUR FANS / TOOLS

Success in the music business is all about your fans. Without fans, you're just a hobbyist.

There's nothing wrong with that. If you just love to create music, create it. You don't need any music marketing tips to do that.

But if you want your music to be heard, or if you want to make money in the music business, you need to find and grow your fan base.

It used to be, the only way to make new fans was to tour. Later, you could make fans through the radio. The internet has leveled the playing field. It removed the power from all the old gatekeepers. You just have to determine how you want to reach your new fans.

To that end, I offer these tools and suggestions.

HAVE A WEBSITE

Go to GoDaddy and buy a domain. Please don't rely on sites like Facebook unless you don't want or expect to be around in 5 years.

A website is essential to your long-term success, even if in the short-term all it is is a splash page where people can find you on social and sign up to your mailing list. You need a website!

BUY A DOMAIN

Buy the domain for 10 years. Make it last. This podcast is in for the long haul. I hope you will keep selling music because of it for years to come.

Again, you don't need a fancy website. A simple "brochure", one-page website with links pointing around the net, is fine. In fact, the brochure model is a great way to get people to your most-important info. Check out www.celtfather.net. I create several pages like this.

START A MAILING LIST

I strongly recommend that you have your own email list. Email is still the number one way for you to communicate with your fans. You will sell more music and merch if you have one.

You can get one free with Reverbnation.com. If you're selling on Bandcamp.com, you can get one there.

You can get a better quality one that offers autoresponders and other marketing features through Mailchimp, Aweber or other sites.

Send out a newsletter at least once a month. If you have a lot of exciting news, you can send it more often.

Give your fans a reason to read each and every issue. Don't just talk AT them. Use your email list to start a conversation with your fans. Engagement is the name of online communication. The more you can get your fans talking to you (and to each other), the better.

SUBMIT TO CD BABY

Post your music on CD Baby. You pay a one-time fee (and they offer discount codes all the time to save on that price). They will easily submit your music to Apple Music, Amazon, Spotify, Google, and everywhere you want online. Their fee is minimal and worth every penny.

If you want to sell CDs, they offer a great service as well.

Plus, if your band breaks up (heaven forbid), your music will always be available, at least digitally. I always lament bands that breakup and disappear forever from the net.

GET ON BANDCAMP

I love Bandcamp. You can use it for free. The Pro version has a monthly service fee. I don't recommend that when you're starting out. But at some point, it is worth going Pro. It's a much better service. Bandcamp is an important tool for our uncertain musical future.

Bandcamp allows you to sell downloads. Fans can also stream the music through the Bandcamp app.

You can use the suggested sales price of \$7. Fans can "name a price" and pay more if they want.

You can add bonus goodies to your digital products. Imagine an audio recording where you tell people about the inspiration behind the album. You can make it a Bandcamp exclusive. Or how about offering a digital songbook?

The goal is to give value that is unavailable anywhere else, like Spotify. You will sell more this way.

Bandcamp allows you to sell merch directly to your fans. You can do one-off artistic items or bulk items like CDs and shirts.

TIP: When setting shipping prices for merch, make sure you pack up a test box of whatever you're gonna sell. Figure out how much shipping is. Shipping breaks many artists.

One of the best things I like about Bandcamp is the mailing list. You have full access. But everyone who buys on Bandcamp becomes a part of the ecosystem, making it easier to buy from you in the future. Bandcamp will even notify your fans when you post new merch.

OTHER MERCH SITES

If you don't use Bandcamp, I highly recommend you find another merch site. You can even set one up on your own website.

One online retailer I am considering trying out is Shopify. They integrate with Spotify. They also have a lot more flexibility with offers and the ability to upsell more merch.

Merch is a big part of our digital futures. We just need to figure out how and what to sell now that CD sales are declining.

MAKING MONEY ONLINE

The biggest problem with streaming, and for that matter my podcast, is they don't make money. You need a revenue stream. Since I just mentioned selling stuff online, we're gonna step offline for a moment to talk about merch.

WHAT MERCH SHOULD YOU SELL?

There are many merchandising opportunities for up and coming musicians. My goal is to help pick the best one that best serves your audience.

CDs

If I was to start over as a musician today, I would not sell CDs. They are a dying media. They're also not environmentally friendly, which is on my mind a lot these days. There are better

alternatives that will serve a wider audience that is moving more and more away from CDs and toward streaming.

But let me be clear. I'm not suggesting you ditch CDs as a sales product. It's a personal choice.

CDs will sell well to our Celtic music audiences for another 5-10 years and probably longer. Half of my income at gigs comes from selling CDs.

Buy 1 for \$20. Buy 2 and get 1 free. That's 3 CDs for \$40.

It's an easy sale.

I've long been a fan of Kunaki. They offer very affordable one-off and low-cost CD replication. They make it worth keeping CDs as your primary product.

My biggest complaint with Kunaki is that they put all of their CDs in shrink wrap. That is not environmentally friendly. However, you can print just CDs without a jacket.

If you're just starting out, why not create your own CD jacket at home. That gives you a much more ecologically-friendly way of selling CDs.

I looked around for local printers and couldn't find short-run CD producers. Supporting local businesses is always best.

I use Discmakers for runs of 100 CDs. You can save money by ordering a thousand, but I don't recommend it. I learned the hard way that buying too many CDs is a bad idea unless you're actually selling a thousand in a short period of time. I have 3000 CDs sitting on my shelf because I ordered too many.

Stick to the short run CD duplication.

Or start testing new items.

That's what I'm doing. Let me share with you the items that seem to work and those that don't.

DOWNLOAD CARDS

You can buy download cards cheap through CD Baby. But I've had virtually no success selling them at shows. People are more likely to ask if the album is on iTunes or Spotify.

I do have success giving them away to people who tip.

I met a musician who said he used this technique successfully. But that's all he offers, download cards. When you have CDs, it seems more difficult.

TIP. If your fans don't have an option like CDs, they will buy what IS available.

You can also use Download Cards to upsell other merch.

Buy a shirt. Get a download of our latest album.

If you want to upsell a product with download codes, do not go through CD Baby. You can get bulk download codes through Bandcamp very easily and include them with any merch offers.

By using Bandcamp, you will get them into that ecosystem where you can sell them more easily on future products.

USB DRIVE

The base price of USBs is a bit high, \$3-6.

USBs seem to sell better when you have multiple albums on it. This gives the fan "extra value."

Unfortunately, I feel like they are lousy as merch, because sometimes fans want autographs. A tiny autograph on a USB, kinda sucks.

I offer a USB for older albums in my catalog.

A prolific musician friend of mine sells his eight album catalog for \$60. Then he sells a second USB for \$20. It features everything new from the previous year. But he releases a LOT of new music each year.

SHIRTS

It's all about the design. I'm a terrible graphic designer. The one shirt that sells successfully for me is "Kilted For Her Pleasure".

If you or one of your bandmates are good at art, awesome! Design a shirt. Test out sales at shows.

Oh! And keep the number of screen colors limited to keep the cost down. One color is ideal, at least if you're starting out.

I've seen some success with doing a new shirt design each year for the podcast. It's hit and miss though. My 2018 podcast shirt sales were dreadful. There are way too many of those still in stock.

The toughest thing about shirt sales is the stock. You never know who will buy, and so you have to keep multiple sizes available.

I'm fortunate to know a screen printer who keeps shirts on hand for me.

For most bands, I'd recommend one of the many on demand shirt printers like Threadless, Printful, or Cafepress. Start by selling the shirts online to see if the design is good enough to make people want to buy it.

Shirts are expensive and bulky to keep on hand. So I prefer other merch options.

STICKERS

I always thought of stickers as an absurd merch item. Who buys stickers? You give those away, right?

It turns out people do. Again, it depends on the design or slogan. It has to be something interesting. But yes, they will buy it.

CD Baby offers download stickers. One side has a download code. The other has the album artwork.

The idea seems great, but like download cards, people just don't seem interested. Or at least I'm not sure how to sell them.

Stickers do seem like a great way to sell an EP though. But I need to test it more before I can say for sure.

SHEET MUSIC

A lot of Celtic music fans are aspiring musicians. Sheet music seems like a logical addition to your merch table.

That said, I don't read music well. I certainly don't write it. But the one album that is transcribed entirely into a book of sheet music sells poorly. I don't think this works for my audience. But it could work for yours.

SONGBOOKS

I found a printer that allows me to publish short booklets. You can print between 8-64 pages.

It's sort of like selling CD liner notes. I add a download code to the songbook.

I am fairly pleased with this product, but I think it might sell better if I wasn't also selling CDs.

Sales are not as good as with CDs. I released one album as digital-only music through these songbooks. I re-released the album on CD when sales did not match what I hoped.

I think it's a good alternative for people who like physical products but don't want a CD.

The company I use to print my songbooks is called Overnight Prints.

BUTTONS

This is another one like stickers that seems weird to me. But there are people who love them. It just depends if you can find the right design or slogan to inspire people to buy.

ALBUM PINS

What is an album pin? It's an enamel pin themed to a particular album or song. At the merch table, fans see a postcard that includes an album cover, track listing, and a QR code to listen to the album. When someone says, "I don't buy CDs," I point out the Album Pin.

A lot of people seem excited about this idea, especially those who don't have a CD player. But does it make up for lost sales?

Frequently yes. I now offer Album Pins AND CDs. If they like CDs, they will go for those. If they don't, I tell them about the pins and they buy one. The additional sales of pins rejuvenated merch sales for me to what they were in 2015. Woohoo!

The key to selling Album Pins is presentation and design.

First, you need a good way to display the pins.

I use postcards. They serve the same function as physical CDs. Customers look at the album cover and read the track listing to find the album the songs they want. If someone wants the card autographed, I can sign the postcard too.

More often than not, they don't care about the postcard itself. So instead of pinning the Album Pins to those, I pin them to customized business cards with the download code and link on the back along with a QR code that makes it easy to get to the download link and so they are also more likely sign up to my newsletter.

The #1 key to successful Album Pin sales is the same as the shirts. It's all about the design!

I have over a dozen Album Pins now. My Celtic Cat logo Album Pin is my best-selling pin. People who love Celtic knotwork or cats buy that one because of the design.

Every other Album Pin sales depends on the audience. I consider most of those to be unsuccessful.

Make a design that reaches more than just your fans. You can also target a pin to a very specific audience. Your fans will buy for the music and strangers will buy for the cool design. Thus, you make more money and potentially make new fans as well.

I like to tell people, "You can wear your album on your sleeve."

Technically, that is true. It makes people smile. But keep in mind, it is uncomfortable to wear pins on your shirt (hough they make good Kilt Pins). So consider selling a means to display the pins as well. That could be a hat, a lanyard, a display case... I'm still working on ideas for that.

The other downside is that you do need to order in bulk of at least 100 album pins to make them financially viable. But they don't take up much space, so it's not too bad.

If you decide to do this, please email me so I can tell my community that you too have album pins.

OTHER MERCH

The sky's the limit with merch. Other ideas include: shot glasses, jewelry, tea towels, baseball caps, jackets, art, and lots more.

QUICK WORD ON SUSTAINABILITY IN MERCH

Not enough is said about ecological sustainability in the music business. I haven't actually thought much about it myself until recently. I think most of the items I listed are fairly sustainable or usable and reusable. Let's go through a few thoughts on each.

The biggest culprit with environmental issues to me is the physical CD. They are usually packaged in plastic that is not easily recycled. Order CDs without plastic when you can, but make sure you have good cases to protect CDs during transport.

USBs are currently pretty reusable, but I can't help but wonder when the current version will be out-of-date since more and more computers are moving to USB-C. Yet, I haven't seen any USB-C Drives.

Most shirts that are sold are 100% cotton. If it's a great shirt and design, then they will be pretty sustainable. But keep in mind that a LOT of textiles end up in landfills. My biggest problem with shirts is the printing. It's difficult deciding HOW MANY to order. I still have 10 year old shirts on my shelves that are size Small or 2XL. They haven't sold.

A better solution is to use a one-off shirt printer like Cafepress, Printify, Threadless, or one of the countless other one-off printers. Sell them exclusively online and you don't have to worry about that problem. However, some of those use a type of plastic to adhere the artwork to the shirts.

Stickers are usually made from vinyl, which is PVC plastic. In fact, it's one of the more toxic plastics out there. It is recyclable, but most curbside recycling won't recycle it. There is a greener alternative, Crystaleen, but I haven't yet found where to order them or how much they would cost.

Sheet music and songbooks seem like pretty good items for sustainability's sake.

My Album Pins are typically made from enamel, which uses a type of epoxy. Epoxy can be recycled through a special facility. It can also decompose over time. The biggest problem with epoxy is that it is [linked to refining crude oil](#). There are alternatives. But I haven't researched those.

Some other eco-friendly options include: plantable download cards, tea towels, aluminum water bottles, tote bags, custom-printed seed packets, bookmarks, journals, or my favorite Celtic Heartstrings. I'll tell you more about that in a moment.

Obviously, we are bootstrapping musicians. We can't always afford to be 100% sustainable. The ultimate goal is to at least think about your impact on the environment and make good decisions.

CELTIC HEARTSTRINGS AND HANDMADE ART

My favorite eco-friendly merch item is my Celtic Heartstrings. These are pendant necklaces "made from the broken strings of my heart... I mean autoharp."

Yeah. I break a lot of strings on my autoharp. Rather than throw those strings in a landfill, I turn them into jewelry. Each one is custom-made, and each comes with a download of an album.

Do you have broken strings that you can recycle into art? What else do you go through that you are able to reuse and sell? Keep it in mind. Perhaps you can share your own handmade art with your fans.

Now let's get back to promoting yourself online.

SOCIAL MEDIA

It's the bane or the joy of musicians. I despise social media. But I see it as an essential tool for promoting music.

The big question is which is the best platform. Which should YOU use?

The simple fact is there is no right answer. Fans will use whatever service you prefer or they just won't be able to follow you except via email. Again, this one reason *email is SO important*.

Some folks recommend that you be on all the platforms. I don't. I find myself overwhelmed when I try to create content for every platform. Instead, I suggest you use what works best for you. So here are the current top platforms and how you should consider using them

FACEBOOK

This is my preferred platform. Facebook followers are typically older. That fits perfectly in the Celtic music demographic. I exclusively use my Fan Page rather than my Personal Page. My goal is to post one piece of content per day.

Marketers use the term "value-added content" to describe content that is fun and engaging for your audience. This could be music, videos, podcasts, pictures, blogs, questions, etc.. The more engaging the content, the better it will do.

I used to play a 20-minute show for my fans using Facebook Live. That's value-added content. Fans can watch live, comment, and watch replays if they so desire. But Facebook's algorithm stopped working for me. So I moved my livestreaming to YouTube.

I promote the show with banners. But I also include text where I ask questions and look for song requests to try and engage my audience. Again, "value-added".

I try to schedule all of my week's posts on Monday, one per day. If I have additional stuff to share, I will add that in and make a given day extra full of fun stuff to engage with.

Facebook's reach is notoriously bad. Posts also don't have a long life before they are forever ignored.

I use Facebook Groups to better interact with fans. I have one group called Irish & Celtic Music Club and one called Celtic Geeks. Any time I come across Celtic music or culture posts, I share them in the Club. If I come across Geeky stuff by Celtic bands, I share that in the later group. Members are more likely to see those posts.

The final reason I use Facebook is because of the power and utility of Facebook Ads to find new fans and reach old ones. Yes, I'm not a fan of spending money to promote my music. But I do believe there's a time and a place for it.

I recommend you educate yourself on Facebook Ads before you try to "promote a post" (which I don't recommend).

TWITTER

I have a Twitter account, but I mostly abandoned it for music purposes. I don't like the platform overall. However, I do recommend that you have an account for one purpose--contacting the media.

Every journalist, podcaster, TV show, video producer, or blogger has a Twitter account. It's a great way to communicate with the media.

INSTAGRAM

Instagram is owned by Facebook. But it's doing something different. First off, it's attracting a younger crowd. So if your audience is younger, I'd recommend you focus on this platform.

InstaStories is gaining tremendous popularity. Now, they have IGTV, vertical shows for you to watch.

I'm a terrible photographer. So I don't use Instagram much for that purpose. However, I have found the fun and utility of InstaStories. You can share Spotify playlists, live performances, photos, upcoming shows, and lots more. It's a great platform if you can figure out how to use it.

YOUTUBE

YouTube is not your typical "social media" platform. But a lot of the success I've learned about it stems from the social aspect of the site.

It is also the second most-popular search engine. So I recommend you have a YouTube channel and use it.

I tried posting individual videos. I didn't get enough views to put this into my YouTube marketing plan.

Instead, I moved my livestreaming to YouTube. Most videos get very few watches. But every now and then, a show clicks and gains popularity.

Learn about the best practices. Learn how to promote videos there. And keep building it. Unlike Facebook, it will serve you well for years to come.

STREAMING MUSIC ONLINE

“FOLLOW ME ON SPOTIFY”

Those are the words you need to memorize and repeat at shows, on your website, and everywhere you go.

Spotify is an interesting phenomenon. You may have heard the story that they don't pay artists. Technically, they do. But they can't pay a lot.

I was on MP3.com back in the day. They paid about 5 cents per download. They also went under because it was not profitable.

Spotify pays about \$0.005 per stream. It's not much UNLESS you get a LOT of streams.

Dropkick Murphys have ten million streams of their music. Flogging Molly have over a million. Gaelic Storm about 300,000. The numbers drop from there.

That's because older Celtic music fans have not yet fully embraced streaming music. But they will.

I ask Celtic music fans all the time if they stream music. More and more are saying yes. Even older folks.

Your goal is to talk to your fans. Tell them it's okay to listen to your music on Spotify. Ask them to “Follow Me On Spotify”.

SINGLES

When the music industry started, it was all about the “single”. Guess what?

The single has returned.

Should you make albums or singles? That’s a creative decision.

That said, I have a Celtic artist submit single after single to me. I keep playing them. I confess she’s at the top of my mind as a result.

When you submit to the podcast, I ask you to make three song/tune recommendations. That’s sort of like sending me singles.

Pick your best tracks, the ones your fans love. Promote those above all others.

If people love those singles, they will seek out more of your music in the future.

Once you have your singles, it’s time to figure out playlists.

BUILDING PLAYLISTS

The third step to embracing Spotify is to figure out playlists. CD Baby offers a free ebook on the topic. I have not mastered this yet. But here’s what I learned.

I started a Christmas playlist a few years ago. I made it mostly for my family. It has Christmas songs I love. Some are traditional Christmas songs, some are Celtic, most are not. It’s just good Christmas listening. And the playlist is public.

In 2017, the list finally took off. I gained over a thousand subscribers. I had several tracks of my own on the playlist. I never calculated how much I made, but it was a couple hundred dollars.

More importantly though, I made a playlist that people could enjoy. That’s what playlisting is all about.

If you’re working the music discovery angle, then you need to create a playlist for a community. You need to make it something they people want to follow and listen to!

Playlists are not set in stone either. They change constantly.

If you get bored with a song, remove it.

If you find a new song, add it.

Make a playlist that *you* want to hear...and add in some of your music.

Don't make a dozen playlists either. Make one good one. Promote it. Share it. Enjoy it.

THEN make a second playlist.

Here's another example...

IRISH & CELTIC MUSIC: BEST OF... PLAYLIST

In 2022, I started a playlist for the Irish & Celtic Music Podcast. It features the most-popular music of the show as voted on by Patrons of the Podcast.

Patrons listen to each episode. They vote for their favorite song or tune. The 1-3 most-popular tracks are added to the playlist every week. The [2022 playlist](#) has over 221 people that listen as of April 2023. Each track on there gets 6-8 plays a month.

The [2023 playlist](#) has only 68 followers. But since it's more active, the tracks are getting 16-30 plays.

Since I started the [Top Irish & Celtic Music playlist](#) in 2018, over 700 people have followed it. If I can grow it and get more people listening, enjoying, and finding new artists, this playlist will be a powerhouse at making money FOR ARTISTS!

I'm excited about the prospect. So do me and these indie artists a favor. Follow the playlists. Listen and share it with your fans.

Remember also that if your songs get voted to the list, you too could profit from it.

SUBMIT TO OTHER PLAYLISTS

Playlists are all about themes. What is the listener in the mood to hear?

Pick your favorite singles and contact playlists to submit music.

Check out the CD Baby guide for suggestions on how to do that.

GIVING AWAY MUSIC

When I started on MP3.com, I learned that if I gave away my music, people would buy it. That's a little known marketing truth. People will support something financially if they love it.

For a while, I gave away all of my music for free. My music sold really well. It's a scary idea to give away your art for free.

That's why musicians have so much trouble with Spotify. You are basically giving away everything for free.

I have 25 albums. All are available with the click of a play button. Basically for free.

I keep repeating that because despite what I learned about giving away music, I know how scary it is. I am trying to overcome my own fears.

It's a different mentality. It's a change in how we approach music creation and how we make money.

If everyone can hear your music for free, then you don't have to sell them on it. You just have to get them to listen.

If that's the case, our goal is firmly no longer about selling CDs to make money. It's about growing our fan base.

What is best for our fans?

What will inspire them to support us so we can keep making our music?

I found one way—Patreon.

PATRONAGE WITH PATREON

Merch sales are awesome. But if we're truly gonna adjust to the new economy, then we need patrons. We need people listening to our free music but supporting us financially through their generous donations. That's where Patreon comes into play.

Patreon is a way for fans to support the things they love. Think Kickstarter, but with money coming in every month.

Or think of it like starting a fan club. For \$1, \$5, \$10 per month, a fan can get behind the scenes access to you and your music.

I started mine a few years ago. I earn \$1000 every month from fans who want me to keep creating my own unique style of Celtic Geek music.

Musicians like Amanda Palmer use Patreon to fund her entire career. Others turn fans into virtually a record label.

In fact, I found an actual record label that is funded entirely through Patreon.

Now to be fair, if you don't have fans, Patreon will not do anything for you. So how should you use it?

Let's create a...

STEP-BY-STEP DIGITAL MUSIC MARKETING PLAN

1. Create good music.
2. Submit your music to CD Baby.
3. Post your music on Bandcamp.
4. Create a website.
5. Setup an email list.
6. Start gigging. A lot.
7. Tell listeners to Follow You on Spotify.
8. Create one piece of merch to sell. Test it on Bandcamp and at shows.
9. When you have 100 rabid fans on your mailing list, start your Patreon account.

From there, it's a simple matter of repeating these steps until you're a superstar.

BONUS

HOW TO GET REVIEWED

The bigger question is: why do you want to get reviewed?

Reviews don't matter much in this day and age. They are a vanity metric. Unless you have someone like Rolling Stones Magazine or maybe the Irish Music Magazine, it doesn't mean squat. And it won't help you sell CDs. The only reason to get reviewed is to stroke your ego.

However, reviews can help you sell more CDs if done properly. But I'm not talking about hitting up big magazines. I'm talking about your fans.

Fans are the most important metric today. You want raving fans. You want to hear what they love about your album. You want to know how it makes them feel and where and when they listen. That's useful data for you. It is something venues, radio, and other media will value. Because if they see your fans rabidly talking about you, then they will want to talk to you too!

DON'T PANIC

I know it's scary to think about this huge change in the industry. But don't worry. We have a few years to prepare. It won't be all death and gloom.

We make Celtic music because we love it, not because we expect to get rich.

Oh! And this game plan is just one of many possibilities. It's the one I'm working on. It might not be perfect for you. So do what you think is right for yourself.

You will be alright!

TO BE CONTINUED...

This book is a work in progress. As I learn more tips to help you, I will.

If you have any suggestions, or things that have worked for you, please email me celticpodcast@gmail.com. I'd be happy to share them in an update.

ABOUT MARC GUNN

Marc Gunn is a Rhythm & Folk songwriter who fuses Irish and Scottish folk songs with pop culture. His musical weapon of choice is the autoharp. He breathes Rock and Roll into this folk instrument and adds a bellowing taste of rhythm & blues.

Gunn found musical inspiration performing Irish drinking songs. He learned the art of performing at Renaissance faires and from his childhood idol, Elvis Presley, who said, "You've got to put on a show to draw a crowd." His concerts are fun filled with sing along songs that get the audience's feet tapping.

Gunn finds lyrical inspiration for this songwriting through his Celtic heritage as well as his love of pop culture. He was raised on Star Wars, Star Trek, Lord of the Rings, Dungeons & Dragons,

Doctor Who, and Firefly. He writes songs inspired, not by the characters, but by the themes that he discovers in the fandoms he consumes. This makes very real, down-to-earth songs about love, fear, and hope. All the while the songs are great for singing along in the Celtic tradition.

For Gunn, it started small, wearing a kilt on campus at the University of Texas. As one half of the acclaimed Brobdingnagian Bards, Gunn and partner Andrew McKee developed a loyal following with weekly performances on campus. This quickly led to gigs at Celtic festivals, Renaissance faires and eventually science fiction conventions, where their popularity exploded.

When the Bards split up in 2008, Gunn left Austin and began producing albums in overdrive. He now has over 20 solo albums on his homespun Mage Records label. His most-popular albums include Irish Drinking Songs for Cat Lovers, Don't Go Drinking With Hobbits, Firefly Drinking Songs, Scottish Songs of Drinking & Rebellion, and Sci Fi Drinking Songs. He has released over fifty albums in his catalog.

In 2014, Marc Gunn launched the Gunn Runners Club on Patreon where he continues to release new songs to fans. He believes the music industry is changing and that musicians will rely more heavily on fan support in the future

Gunn's activities are not restricted to musical performance alone. In 2005, he transformed his popular Celtic Music Magazine into one of the first music podcasts. Irish & Celtic Music Podcast was one of the earliest podcasts to go online and definitely one of the longest lasting. It is still published after 12 years and has since won four times for Best Music Podcast in the Podcast Awards, the latest award in 2022.

Whether it was from playing D&D as a kid or having his mother move to Italy in 1985, Gunn has an adventurer's soul. He combines his love of travel with his love a music. Every year, he takes other Adventuring Souls on Celtic Invasion Vacations. These are small groups of people who want to not just see famous sites, but to experience their culture, history and legends.

Marc Gunn continues to change the way we look at the music industry. He has raised the bar and held it high. Using the musical past and a vivid imagination bolstered with ambition and drive, he blazes trails from Verse to cyberspace, encouraging others to follow.

Find out more and read my Celtic Music Blog at www.marccgunn.com.