Hone Your Talent & Realize There is a Place for You

Not everyone is a Quincy Jones, a Beatles, or a Bruce Springsteen, but if an artist like Tom Waits is a vocalist, then there is definitely room for you too. Do the work necessary to excel in your niche, whether it's writing a chart, engineering a session, providing backup vocals, or teaching kids the basics of music.

Your goal, to use marketing lingo, is to "position" yourself in your "market" as the go-to person for that particular skill or talent. Don't worry too much about industry rejection. Every record label in Britain initially passed on the Beatles and The Rolling Stones. The key is believing in yourself and persevering beyond others' opinions (even those of "the industry").

Connect with as Many People as You Can

Relationships drive music careers more than anything else, even talent. Music is a "who-you-know/who-knows-you" kind of business. The quality and quantity of your relationships will be the primary engines of your progress. Try developing creative projects with fellow-musicians. Perhaps you can combine your live show with two other acts and present the package to a local promoter. There is strength in numbers. Finding the right combinations takes experimentation.

If you're interested in working in the business side of music, then interning at a music company is the best way to both learn how the biz works and connect with those who can help move your career along.

Accept the New Powers in Your Corner & Take Responsibility for Creating Your Own Success

The last twenty years has given you the means to both produce and distribute your own music on a global scale. New models of business are emerging in the world of music. A "record deal" is not necessarily the goal any longer. The Internet has clearly become your "open mic" to the world, and desktop technologies provide you with ways to have the look, reach and efficiency of larger companies. Dare to be different.

Remember, new power also means new responsibilities. Global reach means a potentially far-flung audience. You need to be ready for the incoming messages and questions from this new market. Have you created the best business structures to hold and express your work? Are you setting up effective systems to communicate with your audience? It's up to you to create your own success and not merely rely on a record company or agent to do the work of making you visible in the marketplace.

Understand That Every Business is Becoming a "Music Business"

Musical opportunities are multiplying. It took a coffee company and a computer manufacturer to teach the music industry how to sell music in the digital age! Non-music businesses everywhere are seeking creative ways to add music-related services to their mix. This means that you needn't be dependent on the traditional "music industrial complex" for music career success.

Think of companies you already resonate with and try brainstorming ways you can link up. Start on a local scale. It might be a gift shop, bookstore or arts organization. It may even evolve into a full-fledged sponsorship for a tour or recording project. Find ways to add value to what these businesses are doing with what you have to offer. Forging creative alliances is key to building a multi-dimensional music career.

Prepare to Be Versatile and to Wear Several Hats Initially

It takes awhile to establish your "brand". Most musicians I know have had to cobble together several revenue streams in the early stages of their careers in order to make enough money to support themselves. Many have also had to take on a non-music "lifeline career" just to make ends meet, pay down debt, or supplement what they earn from music.

I tell musicians to not so much look for "a job," but to seek out the work that needs to be done. It might be arranging a song, playing a wedding gig, helping organize a concert series, doing a jingle session, offering private music instruction, or writing a review of your favorite band's new CD. Eventually, all the different experiences merge together into the roaring river that will be your music career. At that point you'll be visible, in demand and able to name your price. And that's career success.