



How to get a Record Deal...

An introductory offering into the understanding of an A&R's role in the process of signing a new act.

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What is an A & R?

A&R representatives (an acronym for Artists and Repertoire) are record company personnel whose job it is to discover new talent and help develop careers. The further A & R reps can climb up the corporate ladder and the bigger their salary, the more stressful their job, and also the more fearful they become of losing it. They have a great responsibility to make money for their companies and to justify their career positions. For this reason, A&R reps often follow trends; look for "sure things," or wait to see what A & R reps at other labels are pursuing. Contrary to popular belief, most A & R personnel do not have "signing power." Once an A & R representative finds a potential artist, they have the difficult task of getting the approval of their record company presidents—and getting approval is often the hardest part of the job! The average life-span of an A & R rep at a label is three years.

What A & R Look For in New Talent

A & R reps look for artists who have potential hit songs, a signature sound, a marketable image, long-term career potential (i.e., youthfulness, and adaptability), and a great live show. A & R reps prefer business-minded bands that first help themselves. Artists who press and sell their own recordings, perform live, build a strong fan base, design their own websites, establish a strong web presence, and have a very clear vision of their goals are far more attractive to record company representatives than those who don't. Musicians who know everything from what sort of image they want to how they want their album cover artwork and videos to appear make an A & R rep's job that much easier. A & R reps also look for artists who have a great work ethic. Will the members of the band/group continue to work hard at creating their own breaks once they get signed, or will they rely entirely on their label to do everything? Will they have the endurance to tour relentlessly or will they burn out quickly? Do they have wives, kids, substantial bills, and other domestic responsibilities that may inhibit the pursuit of their goals? Simply put, record labels look for the path of least resistance to ensure that they'll make a profit from their investments.

Where A & R Look for New Talent

A&R representatives discover new bands through independent record labels, listening to college radio stations, searching the bins of mom-and-pop record stores, attending local club performances, reading reviews in local and national trade magazines, attending annual music conventions and conferences, surfing the Internet for MP3 music files, and keeping a watchful eye on Sound Scan reports (a magazine that reports album sales figures by tracking registered bar codes). They also rely on referrals made from established bands, record label scouts, friends and relatives of industry executives, reputable producers, managers, attorneys, and publishing companies.

When A & R Sign New Talent

Pin-pointing the exact time of year that A & R representatives are most likely to sign new talent is difficult, however one thing is certain: there's usually not many signings during the fourth quarter (October through December). During this period, most companies' financial budgets for new projects have likely been accounted for or depleted. Additionally, being that it's the holiday season, most companies are focusing on pushing its major artists whose new albums are usually timed for release right before the holiday shopping season. Of course there are exceptions to the aforementioned; it's possible for a really hot band in the middle of a bidding war to get signed in the fourth quarter, but generally October through December is really not a good time for new bands.

Final Thoughts

In general, A&R representatives don't like to be approached directly by new artists. In fact, most record companies don't even except unsolicited materials through the mail. Though there are exceptions to every rule, the rep's philosophy is that when you're truly ready to get to a recording agreement, they'll find you! So be realistic about the music biz and your career goals, learn to be more proactive about your career, and just get out there be heard doing what you love best—PLAYING MUSIC!

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