

# The Modern Musician: How to Market Yourself as a Business

By Antoine Fatout

About two years ago, I was sitting in a tiny backstage room aboard a cruise ship in the middle of the Caribbean Sea. Sitting next to me was none other than the legendary Jeff Hamilton, and he was giving me a lesson! The Jazz Cruise that was currently taking place on the ship I was working on was ending the next day, and I could hardly believe my luck. My excitement was overflowing and I had to force myself to calm down so I could enjoy the moment that I was having with this master drummer. I was amazed at his efficient and precise method of teaching; not one minute was wasted. After one hour of his brush strokes/motions and his concepts on jazz and drumming, I knew that it was one of the best drum lessons I had ever had in my life. I couldn't sleep that night.

I have a saying that I live by: "You make your own luck." To be sure, I was fortunate to be working on that cruise ship, but there was a sequence of events that had gotten me to that moment. When I found out that there was going to be a Jazz Cruise, I asked my agent to place me on that ship, and he did. I then discovered that one of my idols, Jeff Hamilton, was coming on that cruise, so I emailed him to see if it was possible to have a lesson. Once he arrived on the ship, I introduced myself and he immediately made the connection to my email, so I wasn't just "some musician" who was working there. Luck may have played a part in it, but ultimately it was my efforts of networking, making a connection, presenting myself in a professional way, and getting over my fear of contacting a drumming celebrity that got me to that lesson.

In today's music industry, college students and graduates enter the world without much preparation on how to act as a business representative for themselves. In most music schools and universities there is very little time dedicated to individualized career development, business skills, and career management. The modern musician has to have multiple skills in order to succeed in today's extremely competitive world. These include basic musicianship, networking, speaking in public, teaching, being a clinician, salesman, website designer, booking agent—and the list goes on.

Jim Rupp, one of the great jazz drummers who teaches at The Ohio State University, introduced me to his theory of, "To build a business, you need three things." First, you need a product to sell: that's you! You are the musician, but who you are and what you do is your "product." Then, you need marketing. How are you going to sell your product? Finally, you need to take care of business and constantly nurture your product with good communication skills, respect, and making/maintaining connections in your network.

What happened to just playing your instrument?

When I was a student at the Berklee College of Music, I was fortunate to have a Career Development Center where I could learn about the business of music. We had clinics and classes about networking, seminars on professional development, and workshops on website design and resume/cover letter writing. I took advantage of all these tools that were at my disposal in order to develop my sense of the business. Not all music students are so lucky, but in our technology-driven society, everything is accessible and available, so it is important to be aware of that and look outside your immediate world in order to grow and get inspired.

## THE PRODUCT

The product that you sell for a living is you, so your first priority is to develop this aspect of your musical personality. It's important to answer questions like:

- What do I want in my career?
- What do I want in my life? (Where do I want to live? How much money do I want to make?)
- What kind of musician am I? (Am I going to be solely a performer? Will I teach? Will I need another job to support myself in the short term?)
- What level of musicianship do I want to reach?
- What are my goals and dreams in terms of career?

These are difficult questions, and they are not always easy to answer. I find that it helps to build a "vision board" to represent these various parts of your life. You have probably heard

about the "theory of attraction." The power of the mind rules all, and what you think essentially becomes your reality. A vision board, whether it is a corkboard that you put pictures and quotes on or a notebook that you use to write down your goals, dreams, and ideas, is essential. Kendrick Scott, one of the great modern jazz drummers, gave a great piece of advice during a clinic I attended. He said that it is important to "write down a sentence on why you play music so you can always refer to it if you feel down or if you eventually take another path, musically or in life." The goal is to focus your attention, make you have clear ideas, envision where you want to go, and give you proof of your success over time.

For example, when I first went to Berklee, I was a jazz drummer, and that was my only focus. Over time, I began to develop an interest in Brazilian music. This interest eventually developed into one of my greatest passions, and I was so obsessed by this type of music that I dreamed of making my senior recital at Berklee all Brazilian music. I had no idea how I was going to pull it off, as I was not integrated into that scene. So I started small, by taking a notebook and writing down song ideas, thoughts, artists I liked, and recordings I listened to. It became my "vision board," and I added to and revised this notebook constantly, referring to it every day. Over time, things began to take shape for me. The title of my senior recital was "The Brazilian Dream," and indeed it was.

To succeed in anything, you need to focus your attention on what you want, like I did with Brazilian music. Setting short term (3–6 months) and long term (5–10 years) goals by writing them down is a good way to continue your "vision board." By simply following these instructions that you write down, you can be infinitely more aware of your progress and find ways to improve efficiently. Every day you are going to work towards and eventually reach your short-term goals, and in turn these are going to contribute to your long-term goals. Small successes will turn into large successes. By using this method, you will not get overwhelmed with the big picture, but will be able to focus your attention and give yourself manageable amounts of daily practice and work.

At the end of the day, you need to love the product that you are going to sell, and more importantly, you need to believe in it. Drive your practice towards the music that you love. Find your passion. You cannot be great at everything at once, but by taking things one step at a time, and by focusing on each aspect you want or need to master, you can develop yourself into a marketable recipe for success.

## MARKETING

The second aspect of being a musician is marketing yourself (your product) and branding your name as a reputable company. The basic requirement of this area is being able to present yourself in a professional way whenever you are in public and representing your product. First impressions are still paramount in our society. That initial feeling that people get about you is what they are going to remember, so make it a good one! Dress well, show up on time, speak eloquently, and show respect.

Bragging comes into play here. In her book *Brag*, world-renowned business coach Peggy Klaus says, “In today’s cutthroat business world, where job security is virtually nonexistent, bragging is a necessity—not a choice!” You may only have a few precious minutes to make that first impression on someone. Have you heard of the saying, “You will never have a second chance to make a first impression”? Prepare a “30-second elevator pitch” so you can brag with taste about yourself. Make sure to include your name, a short summary of yourself (schooling, background, work) and the value of your product. If applicable, it is even more important to include a connection to the person you are talking to in your pitch. For example: “Hello Mr. X, my name is Antoine Fatout. It is nice to meet you. I see that you also graduated from the Berklee College of Music.” In this way, you are making an immediate connection with your audience and they will hopefully be more willing to listen to you because you share something or have something in common. The goal of this elevator pitch is to let another person know who you are as an individual, your background, your career aspirations, and your value in as little time and with as few words as possible.

In addition to connecting with a person over a shared experience, another aspect of marketing yourself involves listening intently and in turn asking people questions about themselves. I believe that it is respectful to want to learn more about the people you meet. Also, people love to talk about themselves and their interests. This doesn’t have to be all business; learning about shared hobbies, taste in food and wine, or telling a joke can sometimes make more of an impression than your resume. To go back to the Jazz Cruise, after a conversation with Jeff Hamilton, I learned that we both liked to smoke the occasional cigar. As a result, I ended up going on a search for authentic cigars

with him during our next port of call in Saint Thomas. This time that we shared, walking around the town and talking in a more casual manner, turned into an eye-opening discussion about music, business, and careers. Without my discovery of this shared interest, that afternoon would never have happened.

Besides making a connection with the people you meet, the idea of marketing yourself and your music is also made with your online presence. Nowadays, if you don’t have a website, you don’t exist. Your website is your online business card, your LinkedIn page is your interactive resume, and your Facebook, YouTube, or blog are the media tools you use to share ideas, photos, videos, and messages. With a viable online presence, people can easily contact you, learn about your product/brand, see your videos, listen to your music, and more, from anywhere in the world.

Be sure to have interesting material to present, such as sharing articles that you like, starting discussions about your beliefs and opinions, posting relevant pictures, and giving updates about your professional activities. In this way, people can follow you and start interesting exchanges based on these materials. However, because it is so easy to share and find information about anyone online, be careful what you share. Make sure that your posts, pictures, and everything else are representative of how you would like to represent your brand.

## TAKING CARE OF BUSINESS

Now that you have a clearer idea of the aspects that make up your product and how to promote yourself as such, the last step is all about taking care of business through networking, communication, and relationships.

According to the Berklee Career Development Center, about 80 percent of jobs are found through networking, so put 80 percent of your time into networking. Networking is such an overused word these days, and it has even gained a bad reputation by those who view it solely as something used by an aggressive and opportunistic person who wants to meet the most important people in his field so he can ask them for a job. This concept is entirely wrong, as true networking is based not on prioritizing your success, but on the success of others around you. In his book *Never Eat Alone*, marketing expert Keith Ferrazzi put it very simply, “Success in life = the people you meet + what you create together.”

To start, connect and talk with the people within your world (whether that is music or otherwise), but don’t forget to also go outside of that world. You would be surprised at how making one contact can lead you to another contact that will help you in your success. Your family circle, the mailman, your hairdresser, and the people who work at the stores you frequent all have connections. No connection is too small, and don’t neglect people just because

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you think that they are outside of your area. You never know where a contact can lead you. Be courteous and kind with the people you meet, make eye contact, and have short but meaningful conversations. (Remember about making a first impression?) Try to help people in their journey and bring good energy in the world, as it will only come right back to you. Most importantly, do this continuously and in every opportunity that you are in. I learned this at Berklee: “As soon as you are outside of your home, you are in the professional world, so act like it.”

Networking and communication are the foundation of success, but you will never reach the next level if you don’t nurture the relationships and the connections that you have already made. Have you ever written an important email to someone and never gotten a response? (This can apply in the same way to phone calls.) Or maybe, if you are lucky, you got a response three weeks later with the “I’m sorry I’ve been so busy” excuse. Conversely, have you ever sent a similar email and got an immediate and helpful response? Which one of those two people that you emailed do you want to work with? I follow a “24-hour rule” for emails or phone calls in order to be taken seriously. I strive to answer every message within 24 hours in order to directly answer a question or concern, let people know that I received their email, or let someone know that I am working on the subject matter in the email. People will appreciate your quick response and be more willing to work with you because business can move forward quickly, such as scheduling rehearsals, meetings, talking about a project, or confirming availability for gigs. A quick response is the best way to build trust between two people.

Even though real human contact and email/phone are some of the main tools of nurturing your network, it is important to apply the same principles of responding quickly to your other social communication tools such as text messaging, Facebook, LinkedIn, or a web contact form. Furthermore, use these tools wisely after you meet someone and make a connection. Sending a short message or email saying “It was very nice to meet you,” quickly alluding to something you talked about in your conversation, and expressing interest to stay in touch will absolutely set you apart from the mass. Focus on the quality of your relationships instead of the quantity. Don’t just blindly hand out your

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business card to every person you meet. Make each encounter meaningful.

## CONCLUSION

Two months after the Jazz Cruise ended, I was back in France visiting my family. Jeff Hamilton was coming to Paris to perform with his trio for three nights at the famous jazz club The Duc des Lombards, in the heart of the city of lights. I decided to go to see him play, and first emailed to let him know that I was in town and would love to see him again. After the amazing concert, Jeff invited me and my friend backstage to chat and have a glass of wine. He even welcomed me to hang with him the following day while he was still in Paris so I could show him around and take him to a drum shop where he was promoting his brand of cymbals, Crescent. During our day, he shared countless pieces of advice, amazing stories, and fascinating thoughts about jazz and the music business. He may have thought I was the one doing him the favor, but it was definitely the other way around. To thank me for being helpful, he invited me to his show that night. That was the moment when I realized that making connections and putting forth effort to maintain them could have a significant impact on your life!

## READING AND WEBSITE SUGGESTIONS

*Working Toward Excellence, 8 Values for Achieving Uncommon Success in Work and Life* (Paul Buyer)

*Never Eat Alone: and Other Secrets to Success, One Relationship at a Time* (Keith Ferrazzi)  
*Brag, the Art of Tooting Your Own Horn Without Blowing It* (Peggy Klaus)

*A Foot in the Door: Networking Your Way Into the Hidden Job Market* (Katharine Hansen)

*Everyone Communicates, Few Connect: What the Most Effective People Do Differently* (John C. Maxwell)

Berklee Career Development Center: [www.berklee.edu/cdc](http://www.berklee.edu/cdc)

Peggy Klaus "Take 12 Questionnaire": <http://www.peggyklaus.com/books/brag/brag-quiz>

Antoine Fatout is a graduate of the Berklee College of Music, where he majored in drum-set performance and studied with prominent faculty such as Ron Savage, Mark Walker, Terri Lyne Carrington, Oscar Stagnaro, and Alain Mallet, to name a few. He has been working for PAS since 2013 as a Student Delegate for Berklee and now serves on the PAS Website Content Sub-Committee. Antoine received an Avedis Zildjian Scholarship to attend PASIC in 2013 and has acted as the official Berklee Representative at PASIC for the past two years. He has a deep love for jazz and Brazilian music. See more about Antoine Fatout on [www.antoinefatout.com](http://www.antoinefatout.com). **PN**

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