

# Promote your music on Last.fm

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*Songwriting and music recording for the creative mind*

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## Introduction

This ebook was written based on my own experience of using last.fm for over 2 years to successfully promote two independent artists. I am not talking about getting 100,000 new fans; rather, I am talking about getting 2,000 listeners and about 500 fans over a month.

This is something you can do with little time investment. Sure, it will require *some* time but you don't have to quit your day job, or risk getting caught up by your boss spending time on last.fm rather than doing some work.

I have made some mistakes along the way, and I have learnt some techniques that work; this ebook presents the way I would do it now if I had to start promoting a new artist, knowing the things I now know.

I have written this ebook because I have found myself giving a summary of this advice on various musicians' forums. I realised a lot of musicians know little about last.fm; so many ebooks have been written about promoting your music on MySpace, but, to my knowledge, none has been written about promoting your music on MySpace. I've done both and last.fm has yielded better results for the same amount of time than MySpace.

You are free to print this ebook, make it available on your website, and email it to your friends. This ebook is free of charge. You are allowed to reproduce parts of this ebook on your blog or website, but I ask you to include a link to my website "Quaxle: songwriting and music recording for the creative mind" at <http://www.quaxle.com>

Now, sit back and relax...

Natalie

## What is last.fm?

[www.last.fm](http://www.last.fm) is a music community website, where users can listen to music they like, as well as discovering new artists. Unlike general community websites such as Facebook and MySpace, last.fm focuses on music only.

It was created by a british team and was sold in 2007 to CBS. The change in ownership hasn't brought any changes to the website so far, except for a few extra functions, such as video.

The two basic principles to discover new artists revolve around the concepts of "similar artists" and "tagging".

Similar artists can be defined by the label/artist when registering, and are then updated by the system based on users data. For example, if many listeners of artist A also listen to artist B, artist B will become "similar artist" to artist A.

"Tagging" refers to the ability for users to tag a song. Tags can be as varied as "punk" and "to fall asleep to". Users can type whatever you like, though it is best to be as descriptive as possible, without being too restrictive.

Listeners can listen to radio stations in a few different ways. They can select to listen to a radio station based on "sounds like Artist A". They can also select to listen a radio station based on a tag, such as "70s rock" tag.

Additionally, tags and similar artists are shown on individual artists' pages, allowing viewers to browse through this way and read more about the artists.

Last.fm gets data from the listeners through a technology called "scrobbling". The user installs a small program on his/her computer and every time he/she listens to a song via Windows Media Player or iTunes for example, the scrobbler makes note of it and then sends the names of the songs to last.fm servers. It does not send any other information so do not worry about confidential details being exchanged.

Additionally, you can download the last.fm player, which enables you to access last.fm radio.

Last.fm doesn't care about the source of the music so do not worry if you have a few illegal downloads on your computer, last.fm will not know about it (*NB: I am against illegal downloading but at the same time, I acknowledge that it is quite common, which is why I am mentioning it*).

## Two ways to register

The first way to register is as a user. A user can set up a profile.

The purpose of being a user is to display the music you listen to, so it is important that you install last.fm scrobber on your computer. Their scrobber is compatible with many audio softwares such as iTunes and Windows Media Player.

You can additionally download their radio player, if you choose to use last.fm to discover new music. For the purpose of promoting your music, downloading their scrobber is sufficient, but I encourage you to also download their radio player to get the full experience.

The second way to register is as a label or artist. You have then access to the “music manager”, which is the area where you control everything for your artist(s).

I find that the best way to promote yourself as an artist is to be somewhat active as a user, so I will explain in the next two chapters how to set yourself up as a user and as an artist.

## Set up your user profile

I suggest you register as a user first, before registering as an artist.

Along with loading an avatar picture, you can write a little blurb about yourself. This will appear on the left side of the screen, just below your avatar.

You can use BBC code to edit your text. This is a good place to briefly explain who you are and what you do.

It is best to start with a one sentence description of your music. On mine, I say “I am a solo post punk artist from London - I like to deconstruct and reconstruct music”. Of course, this definition will not suit your music so I invite you to think about an adequate sentence for your own music.

Underneath, you can write more details, such as whether you gig, if you've got an album out, and a link to your website. What you put is up to you but remember that people are lazy and do not want to read too much text. They want information, not literature.

Install the last.fm scrobber on your computer and start listening to music you like. You can either listen to your own music files stored on your computer, or you can use last.fm radio to listen to a station defined by a tag, for example “indie pop”.

In the next chapter, I will explain how to set up as a label. Once you have done this, come back to this paragraph.

It is important that you listen to your own music as well, because it will help last.fm servers gathering some data for it.

So listen to each of your songs every day for a week or two, and tag them. Use a descriptive and general enough tag. If you're not sure, check out other bands in your genre and check out which are the most common tags for them. Pick the same.

When you listen to music, you will notice that last.fm will update your profile page with a list of songs you have recently listened to. Once a week, it compiles a “top 10” for the week, as well as a few other charts. On some occasions, the charts are late or slow to update themselves. In this instance, be patient, things usually get sorted out within a few weeks. If nothing seems to work after a month, contact last.fm support.

## Set up your artist profile

Once you have set up a user profile, it is time to set yourself up as an artist. You can do so by clicking on “upload music and videos”, on the top left corner of last.fm website.

Technically, you need to upload MP3 files at a 128 kbps rate. If you don't know how to transfer your music to MP3s, I suggest you use a free cross-platform software called Audacity. Whichever program you use to export a music file to MP3, you will be given the opportunity to fill in information such as artist, track, album and year about the song. Make sure you fill it accurately as last.fm uses this information!

Once your file are uploaded, you can select different levels of digital rights, or permissions. You can allow users to stream 30 seconds only, stream full length, or download. Note that this only affects what they can do on your artist profile page - if they already have the songs on their computer, they can of course listen to them as normal.

I suggest you choose “stream full length”. This way, people can enjoy your songs but they cannot own them.

For each album (an album is a set of songs - it doesn't have to be a physical album release), you can include a “shop link”. Last.fm defaults to Amazon so if you want a link to your own website, make sure you modify it.

For each album, you can also upload cover art, as well as specifying a list of similar artists.

Once you've done this, go back to the last few paragraphs of the previous chapter, and listen to your own songs as described there.

## Use your user profile to promote your music

After a while, you will notice in your user profile that you have “neighbours”. Those are people who listen to the same music as you. It is always a good idea to make friends with them, after checking their page of course.

When you listen to a song using the last.fm player, you can “recommend” a track to a friend. Make sure you use this to recommend your new songs to your friends. However, be polite - do not recommend a new song every day, as they will quite likely delete you as a friend.

You might prefer to send your friends private messages before recommending your music, or put a comment in their shoutbox.

But your friends are far from being the only people you can promote your music to. In fact, promoting your music to your friends is just a simple way of testing the waters and getting some kind of feedback. Maybe they will write back some insightful comments, such as “this track reminds me of Song B by artist A”. If a majority of them seem to prefer the same track, then you know which song to promote.

So, who are those other music fans you can target your music to? The answer is fans of artists you are similar to!

When setting up a new album on your artist profile, you will have defined a list of similar artists. Armed with the feedback from your first few friends, you can refine this list. Now, you are ready to target potential fans, rather than target blindly.

Start off with a list of 4 artists.

Go to their last.fm page and check out their top listeners, as well as people who have left a comment on their page.. Go to each user page and if their top bands confirm that they might like your music, then you can introduce yourself to them.

No one likes spam so of course, you have to explain why your music might be of interest to them. Don't beat around the bush and tell them in your first sentence that you noticed they like Artist A and your music often gets compared to Artist A. Ask for their feedback.

Now, the trick is to include a link to one of your songs so they can just click on the "play icon". This is why you need to select "full stream" for your songs, otherwise if they can only hear 30 seconds of your song when they click on the play icon, they will rightly get angry. Why are you promoting your music to them if you don't allow them to check out your music?

I never remember the code to include a playable link to a track but i've found a trick to do it. On your user profile page, click on "write a new journal entry". At the bottom, you have a few "insert" buttons, including "track". Click on this and put the name of your track and artist. The cover art of the release will show up in the "connected music" window if last.fm finds the track. Once it does, copy the code and paste it into your private message to the user you are contacting.

After you contact a few people, you will forget who you have contacted or not. To make sure you do not contact the same person twice by mistake, i suggest you set up a spreadsheet.

You just need one column in your spreadsheet, with their username (which is unique by definition). Every time you start contacting a new batch of users, sort the column by alphabetical order, and look for the username you are thinking about contacting. If you find their name in the list, then you know not to send them another message!

By targeting listeners carefully, you will see a very high positive response rate, maybe as high as 50% in some cases.

## Pay for promotion

You will see a “promotion” section when you go to the music manager for your artist/label.

There are two types: banner and radio play.

Each of them relies on “target artists”, eg your banner is displayed to users who like the artists as specified in your “target list”, or your track is played on last.fm radio to users who like the artists as specified in your “target list”.

For each campaign you set up, you can set up a target list. The target list is different from the “similar artists” list you defined when uploading your album. Furthermore, you can update the “target artists” list in the middle of the campaign. Additional controls include the speed of the campaign = slow, medium, fast.

A banner campaign is useful if you want people to go to your own website, as you provide a link when they click on your banner. So essentially, you are promoting an external website.

A radio play promotes a track you have uploaded onto last.fm system - it is a more internal promoting system. It costs more per play than a banner campaign costs per impression but the return is higher.

With radio play promotion, people can choose to “love” or “ban” your track - last.fm gives you a live report throughout your campaign, so you can adjust your campaign.

I wouldn't suggest to pay for promotion until you have successfully manually targeted potential fans as described in the precedent chapter. A banner or radio play campaign can be very successful if your “target artist” list is appropriate - there is nothing like users feedback to determine this, so individual contact with potential fans is primordial for you to draw a fair picture of how your music is perceived.

## Conclusion

With as little time as one hour to set yourself up as an user, and another hour to set yourself up as an artist, you have access to an audience of millions of music fans.

Last.fm is built in a way that facilitates targeting music fans of a specific band or genre. You can use this to your advantage. The time required isn't huge - you can choose to contact only 10 listeners a week. However, i will not lie - if you do not spend any time on this, no one will find your music by chance.

From my experience, i got a much higher return for the time spent promoting music on last.fm than for the time spent promoting music on MySpace. Rather than using the buggy MySpace search feature, Last.fm provides you with the tools to quickly find fans of bands and artists your music is similar to.

Some people will ask you if your music is available on iTunes or whatever their favourite download service is. Make sure you use CDBaby to make your music available on those services. CDBaby is an american company but you can live anywhere to register with them, as long as you can set up a PayPal account.

So good luck!

*And don't forget - writing and making music you are proud of is more important than figures and statistics!*

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