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The MySpace Phenomenon

International musicians, labels tap web marketing tool

Kevin Roentgen has been an underground hero of the Los Angeles rock 'n' roll scene for more than 15 years, but fate and the vicissitudes of record-company politics have conspired to deny him larger acclaim.

His bands have twice been signed to label deals, but on the first occasion a regime change left the band's A&R rep caught in the crossfire. The group was dropped, and their completed album was never released. Undeterred, Roentgen (pronounced "Rent-gen") started a new band and was swiftly signed again — only to be cut loose after the release of a single album.

Now Roentgen performs solo under the moniker Praying Hands. Having fallen victim to the vagaries of the biz before, he's understandably leery of entering the machine again. Currently in the process of starting his own label, Roentgen is one of an increasing number of musicians doing most of their marketing through myspace.com, a social-networking website that, in a little over 15 months, has taken the World Wide Web by storm.



Praying Hands

Growing Fast

"I think MySpace is awesome," Roentgen says. "I'm on there checking messages and taking new-friend requests at least three times a day. My Praying Hands music page [www.myspace.com/prayinghands] has only been up a short while, and I'm quickly approaching 1,000 friends and my songs have had over 2,000 plays. We just put up a Friends and Fans of Praying Hands Group that collected over 300 members in the first week alone.

"I've been playing in bands for a while now, so fans and friends of my old bands keep finding me on MySpace. When a fan who bought my CD four years ago tells me that they love what I'm doing now just as much as they love the old stuff and that I have a fan for life, it reminds me of just how loyal music lovers are, especially rock fans. They're going through changes in their own lives and growing right along with you.

"The days of the aloof rock jerk are basically over."

Jon Crosby

"And, aside from old fans, I'm building a new fan base for my new music. The traffic to my website has tripled over the past two months. Think it's a coincidence that I started my MySpace music page just over two months back? Online sales and downloads of my acoustic EP have increased too. I think the real test will be when the full CD hits stores this summer. We plan on using MySpace in a big way in the promotion of it."

In the 16 months since its official launch, on Jan. 1, 2004, MySpace has registered more than 13.5 million users (and counting), including over 200,000 musical acts. MySpace is currently racking up 500,000 new users a week, of whom about 5,000, or 1%, start new music pages.

Some MySpace History

In February 2005 MySpace was ranked the No. 7 most-trafficked web domain on the Internet by comScore Media Metrix — a dizzying ascent for a site launched a mere 14 months before. That launch was accomplished by MySpace co-founders Tom Anderson and Chris DeWolfe, who had a unique vision for a social-networking site for their friends.

Integrating personalized profiles, blogs, instant messaging, e-mail, music downloads, photo galleries, classified listings, events, groups, chat rooms and user forums, MySpace has created a connected community where users put their lives online. The name sprang from the idea that MySpace is each user's space or place on the web. It's a website for people who don't know how to build a website.

Like Roentgen, Jon Crosby, ringleader of the band Vast, has turned his back on the major labels in favor of a DIY aesthetic. He signed up Vast on MySpace in January 2005 (www.myspace.com/vast) and has gained more than 4,000 friends in a little over three months. Crosby, who has released three critically acclaimed albums with Vast through traditional means, thinks the MySpace founders are on to something.

"The Internet is a 'me platform,'" he says. "MySpace has tapped in to this, and I think that is why it has exploded. What a lot of people in the entertainment industry didn't understand initially about the Internet is that it is a place where people are more concerned with what they can do, create and express, more so than a place where people want to hear about what other people are doing, like TV and radio.

"I know that people who like Vast really appreciate it when we reach out and talk to them. The days of the aloof rock jerk are basically over."

Indeed, communication is the key for the 21st-century music fan, and that's part of what's led to the meteoric rise of MySpace. A chance to chat with your musical heroes — or to discover brand-new ones — isn't to be lightly regarded. This is especially true for acts from countries outside the U.S. that are trying to make inroads into the American market.

International Perspectives

Ben Durling, manager for U.K. act Long-View (www.myspace.com/long-view), appreciates how MySpace has helped spread the word about his band overseas, leading to their recent signing with Columbia in the U.S.

"MySpace is a great way for artists to create interest and forward momentum for their material without a label," Durling says. "It's a great marketing tool that's genuinely for the artist, not a corporately manufactured site."

Terry Abbott, who fronted U.K. critical darlings Vex Red for two years, has now started a new project, Septembre (www.myspace.com/septembre). A MySpace member since June 2004, Abbott appreciates the site's user-friendliness.

"Traditionally, like a bunch of musicians I know, I was, and kind of still am, a techno-



phobe," he says. "But it's almost too easy to have a play. There's so much help available, too, either for changing the style of your page or just playing around and teaching yourself a few tricks.

"We've certainly had more subscribers to our mailing list since maintaining MySpace more regularly. Plus, given that the nature of our music is more alternative than others, it's a great way to keep in touch with fans and friends. It's easier and almost more fun than actual official band websites. Don't know why, it just seems to work that way."

American Eyes frontman Dave Zonshine might find Abbott's last observation to



Septembre

be true in regard to his group, who recently signed with Sideonedummy. "It's probably driven traffic away from our official site," he says with a laugh. "Our fans know that we check our MySpace page [www.myspace.com/americaneyes] almost daily and respond to everyone who writes us. MySpace created something that is a lot more personable than our official site."

The band's MySpace page has now gathered more than 5,700 friends, and the music posted

there has been streamed over 190,000 times. Zonshine says, "MySpace has been amazing for American Eyes. It creates a face for every fan, making them more than just a random name on an e-mail list. You actually have the opportunity to gain an individual connection with everyone on your friend list, which is the best way to grow as a band."



Vast

Labels Move In

But it's not just musicians who are tapping in to the growing MySpace phenomenon. Labels, both Indies and majors, are increasing their presence on the site. The biggest splash so far has been accomplished by Interscope for Queens Of The Stone Age. The QOTSA music page (www.myspace.com/queensofthestoneage) was set up on Feb. 22 and has proved a smash success. In less than two

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months the group has acquired over 24,000 friends and received more than 183,000 individual profile views.

How did the group and label accomplish this? Simple: They started exclusively streaming the latest album from the band, *Lullabies to Paralyze*, on the QOTSA MySpace page a week before the disc hit retail. The results have been spectacular, to say the least. *Lullabies to Paralyze* debuted at No. 5 on sales of 97,000, almost double the first-week figures for QOTSA's previous effort, 2002's *Songs for the Deaf*.

To ensure that the fans continue to frequent the site now that the album is available in stores, QOTSA and Interscope are offering MySpace members the opportunity to enter a contest to win such cool swag as a surfboard or an iPod shuffle. The strategy seems to be effective: A full month after *Lullabies to Paralyze* hit stores, the QOTSA page remains firmly ensconced in the daily top 40 most-viewed music pages.

MySpace is here to stay, so why aren't you taking advantage of the opportunity? Any and all questions concerning this revolutionary new site will be answered during MUSEXPO, May 1-4 in Los Angeles, by MySpace's Tom Anderson.

Additional reporting by Tom Maguire.

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