A Guide to Digital Marketing for New Creators

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By Lexi Gerbino
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Welcome!

Congrats! You have found the new guide to social media marketing!

I’m going to take a wild guess here and assume you are looking to build yourself (or maybe a friend) a new “brand” and want to gain a following in the exciting digital world. Whether you’re a creative artist, starting a new business, or even just looking to build yourself up online, you are in the right place. We are going to go through the “dos and don’ts” of social media marketing while focusing on organic outreach that you can do without spending a cent. Don’t worry, we’ll talk about a few paid strategies too (just less).

The internet is a scary place sometimes, but we’re going to make it through! This guidebook is put together of past experiences from myself as well as collaborators from all different backgrounds. By collaboration, I meant that I met with them each to hear about their experiences and share their results and advice with you! Hearing from real people seemed like a better choice than to simply re-publish information from other researchers. Be sure to check out my collaborator info page towards the end of the guidebook.
Who Are You?

Before you even think about marketing, you need to ask two questions: who am I and what do I want? If you can’t answer that, you’re not ready to create your digital platform. To help you find the answer, here are some examples of what you could be looking to be and use your platform for. Even if these don’t resonate exactly, the ideas can easily transfer to your own career goals and ideas.

• Who are you trying to be?
  - Independent musical artist
  - Visual artist (painting, graphic design, video and film, sculptures, etc.)
  - Small business owner (clothes, food, custom gifts, etc.)
  - Online personality/influencer

• What do you want?
  - A loyal fanbase, label attention, increased streams, etc.
  - To spread your art; have it seen & appreciated by others
  - To sell your merchandise and breakeven financially
  - Make a name for yourself and see high engagement

Once you figure out who you are and what you want, you want to build your brand. Some of you may be thinking, “what is a brand?” A brand is how you show the world who you are. It’s an extension of yourself. It’s your name, logo, font, profile pictures, color schemes, etc. Everything that you’re using to show people who you are makes
up your brand. If you’re confident in your product, your brand is likely to come to you pretty easily. If not, it’s okay to take your time to figure it out. This is all about you and your voice. The more genuine and real you are the better, as you’re honestly trying to connect with people.

Think about this. If I was an independent female artist who mainly created warm acoustic music, would you expect my brand to be soft and simple, or loud and edgy? I’m 99% sure you thought “soft and simple” and you’re right! My brand is most likely going to have a soft aesthetic, possibly with pastel colors or nature-vibes, and I’m probably going to present myself as calm and laid-back than I would present myself as a partying rockstar using wild fonts and bright neon colors. Your brand doesn’t have to be fancy and flashy, simple things can make it a long way as long as you have a quality product and enough drive!

Consider these questions when thinking about your brand:

• What makes you different from others in your field/market?
  - What about your product/story makes you stand out?
  - How can you use this to your advantage?
• How do you want to be seen?
  - Do you want that genuine “small business/working out of home” style to be you?
  - Do you want to be seen as a “college dorm indie artist?”
• What kind of aesthetics are you looking for?
Consider that soft-simple look of pastels and nature, is that you?
- Do you specialize in abstract art and want that to show through your brand?
- **Are there people who can help?**
  - Do you have creative friends you can reach out to (be sure to credit them!)

The most important thing to remember about your brand is that consistency is key! Once you pick your name, make that your name for everything. If your business is called “Purple Flowers,” do *not* make your handle on Instagram “@thepurpleshop.” Additionally, try to keep your handles the same (or as similar as possible) across all the platforms you’re using. Your followers are not going to know who you are if your name and your handles don’t match or if your handle is completely different for every platform.

It is okay to make subtle changes to your brand here and there but try to avoid any major changes like names and overall aesthetics. And if you are wanting to make those bigger changes, be sure to do it slowly and clearly. One of my collaborators, Jorge Barrière, spoke about one of his past clients that decided to completely change her name out of nowhere and it confused all of her followers which made her go back to her original name. That is not what you want. You want your followers to hear/see your name and know it’s you!

Also, be sure to do your research and make sure the name you choose isn’t already taken; you don’t want to be dealing with name
confusion so early on. Plus, do you want to end up on the 16th page of a Google search, or on the 1st page? I think we all know the answer!
Is target marketing important? **Yes!** Target marketing is one of the most important strategies in any form of marketing and is crucial when working in a digital environment. To do this, you have to ask yourself one question: who am I trying to reach?

Who do you want to see your profiles/ads/products? Are there others out there whose strategies could work for you? This is going to essentially choose how you’re going to market yourself and your product and where you put your focus. If you’re a musical artist, you may ask the following questions:

- What artists are similar to me in genre and brand?
- What are their fans like? Younger? Older? Female?
- What are they interested in? TV? Fashion?
- Who is most likely going to enjoy my music?
- What do they do in their free time? Read? Travel?
- Where are they when they’re online? Social Media? Shopping?
- What social media platforms are they using? Tik Tok? Facebook? Instagram?
- How are they consuming music? Streaming on Spotify? YouTube playlists? Physical CD’s/Vinyl?
- What is their attention span like? Super short? Are they likely to stay and watch a 2-minute video? Or would 30 seconds be better?
Research is necessary when figuring out your target audience, but you’re not going to make it very far without it. For example, if you’re a jazz musician looking to build a fanbase, do you think your target audience is going to be teenagers in high school or adults over the age of 35? Chances are, you’re going to be a lot more popular with the older crowd simply because of your genre of music. But say you have a small business that focuses on custom-made jewelry, you’re more likely to cater towards the younger audience as they’re the ones interested. This is important because different ages use social media and the internet in general quite differently.

This kind of thinking and research is how you pinpoint your desired platforms. You’re probably thinking, “why can’t I just use all of them?” You can use as many as you want! But that doesn’t necessarily increase your chances for engagement. While it’s good to have your eggs in multiple baskets so to speak, you want to put more of your eggs in one or two baskets and focus on those.

Basically, what I’m saying is yes, you can have a platform on Facebook, Instagram, Tik Tok, and Twitter all at the same time, but you’re going to want to pick one or two to focus most of your energy. If you’re the jazz artist catering to an older fanbase, you’re probably not going to want to use Tik Tok as your main platform. Instead, you would want to mostly use Facebook since that is where the older crowds spend their time. On the other hand, the small custom
jewelry business is less likely to find their customers on Facebook and is better using Instagram.

Another collaborator, Axel Tanner, recently has found success using Tik Tok to boost himself as a music curator/personality. He saw that the app was fresh and growing fast and he wanted in. So, he focused all of his energy on Tik Tok and was able to see results after several months and found himself with 16,000 followers along with videos that were getting up to 7 million views. This wasn’t without some trial and error, but Axel took the time to understand the platform and its users. He took a step back and thought, “how can I get the best outcome on this app? What are the users interested in?” Focusing all of his attention on one platform, yet still keeping up on others such as Instagram, he was able to see his Tik Tok following trickle down to his Instagram and Spotify following, as well as open up a space for his truly loyal fans on Discord. Without doing much more than saying “follow me on IG” or “I’m gonna be responding to DM’s on Insta!” he went from 500 IG followers to almost 3,000.

One thing that has been emphasized by all of my collaborators and research is to keep up with the trends! There’s always something new coming up and it’s important to pay attention to what’s in, what’s out, and what is growing. New platforms are constantly maturing into something more. Take a look at Tik Tok! They started
off mostly with fun dances for teenagers to do together, and now it’s an entire community of people from multiple generations. If it had not grown into something bigger, Axel would not have seen the success he did unless he was joining in on those crazy dances.
Engagement

Engage with your followers. Engage with those similar to you. Engage in any way you can to show that you are more than just something to promote. Everything is a balance of give and take and if you never give back to those you are “taking” from in terms of views, likes, purchases, etc., you will burn out fast. People want to feel connected to those around them, especially on social media. Constantly asking them for something can make them no longer want anything to do with you, as you could come off as too pushy.

When Axel started his Tik Tok journey, he was originally posting as a music producer trying to promote his own music. He realized that people wanted more than that, so he began to curate playlists, share his music recommendations, and give back to his followers and it essentially doubled his follows, likes, comments, etc. He said this was his way of providing value while simultaneously asking people to look at content. To him, this is his way of “planting the seed of his brand with good ass music” which will only help him in the future, no matter the direction he chooses to go in.

Sami Fong, another one of my collaborators, is an independent artist with a passion for marketing. During her senior year at the University of the Pacific, she chose to market her own music for 6 months using both paid and unpaid strategies for her last school project. For this, she focused mostly on Instagram to help promote...
her Spotify. She believes that this combination works quite well as you can’t pay for ads forever, but you may not reach your goals if you are only using organic methods.

As mentioned before, I chose to focus mostly on the organic and free ways to market in the digital world, like Axel, but Sami has a point. So instead of me blabbering on about which worked better and how, here are two lists of what Sami did, what she recommends, and some advantages she found in both of these categories.

**Unpaid Strategies**

- **Post Regularly**
  - whatever that means to you; daily, 3x a week, once a week, etc.

- **Mix in lifestyle posts with your product**
  - Hobbies/adventures as well as your new single

- **Behind the scenes content**
  - Recording music, packaging orders, photos of you creating your art, etc.

- **Look into similar markets and find out what works for them**
  - If your music is similar to Shawn Mendes, look at how he was marketing in the early days and apply it to today’s market
  - Interact with similar acts/accounts (comments/shares/mentions)

- **Use Fan Pages**
  - If you’re a One Direction fan and have similar markets, find some popular fan pages and reach out to them
  - Maybe do a 1D cover and share it with some of their pages!

- **Pay Attention to Engagement**
• See what kind of content is getting the most engagement
• If it’s videos, post more of them!
• Sami noticed her acoustic versions of songs were more popular, so she’s planning to put out an acoustic EP to see if the following is still there

**Paid Strategies**

- **Need to be Strong**
  - Make them aesthetically pleasing
  - Use audio to keep the viewers engaged

- **Don’t Spend All Your Money**
  - She spent around $3 a day for a few months and saw an increase from under 1,000 Instagram followers to over 4,000

- **Make Sure Your Account/Site Is Strong**
  - Sometimes people will like your ad and click on it, but your account/site is too messy and busy, so they leave
  - The content you’re directing them to should be equal to or better than the actual ad

- **NO Paid Views/Streams/Follows**
  - Paying for views or follows or any engagement is not helpful
  - Makes the numbers look good, but you have no fanbase/true following

What I’m saying here is do what you feel is best for you, your brand, and your fans. Don’t pay for ads, pay for some ads here and there, or strictly use organic strategies. Different things will work for different people/products/etc. and as an independent starting fresh, you get to choose what you do. Take advantage! Try things, let them fail, then try something else. Marketing is not simple; you can’t just say 1+1= 2 and magically have a huge following. So, do what feels right and do your research!
Lastly, I want to share some tips on how to engage! These have been shown to work across multiple platforms for different people/products.

- Retweet fans/like their comments/share their posts
- Ask questions! Show that you want to talk with your audience
- Respond to DM’s
- Follow people back
- Participate in similar communities

These are just a few ways you can be engaging with your followers and it will help keep them interested and make them want to keep following you. Again, it’s all about the give and take. If you give back to your community, then you’re not constantly asking people to do something for you. As Axel said, it’s about providing value to your fans.
General Advice

As we come to an end of specific categories, I wanted to share a bit of general advice from all my collaborators that I felt will help anyone looking to start new and try to build themselves up using social media and other digital platforms.

Here we go!

- **Think about what you truly want long-term – is it money? To tour? Make a name for yourself?**

- **Try to make use of your resources**
  - People, articles, services (ex. Hootsuite for scheduling posts)

- **Don’t talk at your follows, talk with them. Build a community and be respectful**

- **Look into less popular/odd platforms that can help you connect with fans**
  - Community (text chain), Discord, Clubhouse

- **Have a website! It’s a great place to direct people to learn more about you/your product that’s not just your social media**

- **Find people like you and engage with them**

- **Thank people! Like comments, retweet fans, whatever it is say thank you to those supporting you**

- **Focus on your product and let the marketing follow**

- **Push yourself out of your comfort zone**
Collaborators

Thank you to everyone who shared their experiences with me.

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Axel Tanner – Music Curator/Personality
Axel has found success through curating music and sharing his recommendations and personality through Tik Tok. He had amazing advice for me to share in this project and I can’t wait to see where he goes next!
IG: @axel.tanner | Spotify: @axeltanner | Tik Tok: @axeltanner

Jorge Barrière – Consultant
Jorge specializes in business, marketing, brand management, and more and has worked both in and out of the music industry for years which brought long-term experience into the project.

Sami Fong – Artist/Marketing Manager of SFM Consulting
Sami has been promoting her own music for over a year which has led her to creating her own marketing consulting business. Her experience was a great addition.
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Cecilia Ruvalcaba – University of the Pacific Marketing Professor
Cecilia is a specialist in consumer behavior and spreads her knowledge teaching marketing courses at Pacific. Her views were a great influence throughout this guide.