

Noisy's Guide To....

## Creating a Press Pack!

OK, so you've recorded your bands rocking new tunes and you've got yourselves a demo, gathered the band together for that all-important mean & moody group photo, and now it's time to start telling everybody else about your music... Whaddaya do? This is where press packs come in - basically, they are promotional packages sent to record labels, magazines and anybody else you can think of, to garner interest (i.e. a record deal, review, interview etc.) in a band. Here, we have asked a number of fanzine writers their opinion on what makes a good press pack (after all, these guys get sent loads of them every month!), and offer some pointers of our own. Although this isn't a definitive guide, as there are plenty of books & websites out there that offer advice - you might find this a handy place to start!

Firstly, just because you want to send out your latest CD to all & sundry with the intention of getting a few reviews, doesn't mean you have to put together a whole 'package'. A CD (or cassette or even vinyl) and a press release with basic details about your band will suffice. However, for the purposes of this article, we'll take a look at what goes into a press pack, and how to make yours stand out!

### The Lingo....

**Press Release:** A press release is a basic staple of the media industry - when something happens, a press release is issued - the press release will then form the basis of a news item, review or article, written by journalists. When Metallica release a new album, a press release is issued, when Sharon Osbourne stopped managing The Smashing Pumpkins, she wrote a press release, when Jennifer Aniston & Brad Pitt split up, yup, an 'official' press release stating the facts, was, well... released.

So, if you've made a demo, you can write a press release to tell journalists and anybody else, all about it.

**Press Pack:** A press pack, or kit, as it is also known, is slightly more advanced than a press release - it contains a number of items designed to inform journalists etc. about a band and it's music. It includes perhaps a biography of the band, a photograph or two, a CD, any press clippings the band may have already received, plus anything else the band feels is necessary. Obviously, these are slightly more expensive to produce, but generally provide more detailed information than the press release.

Alison, editor of *Bubblegum Slut* fanzine ([www.bubblegumslutfanzine.1hwy.com](http://www.bubblegumslutfanzine.1hwy.com)) and contributor to magazines such as *Black Velvet* & *Alternative London*, has compiled a list of points for creating the perfect press release:

- **1 side of A4** usually does it, after that we're getting bored...
- **Save telling the entire history of the band** from birthplace, to how we all met, to who left & who replaced them etc. for the biography in 20 years time! Unless it's a particularly interesting story it's not likely to be mentioned in print and not really helping understand the band or write this review...
- **DO mention influences**, not pages of them but 2 or 3 key names, as if this is a genre or band I'm unfamiliar with it's really helpful to put the music in context & use it as reference points in the review.
- **DO include a list of 'key tracks'**, this is one of the best things a band can do on a press release for me! At the moment I receive around 60-70 CDs for each issue of my zine (this is not including CDs I'll buy or receive for other mags each quarter). My philosophy is if you can take the time to send it, I can take the time to review it, however promising to do that means I can't always listen to the entirety of every 1 hour-long album, so a list of 4 - 5 key tracks I can skip to and hear the album's key highs, low and stand-out track is really helpful.
- **Tracklisting!** Sounds dumb but it is a real pain when bands send CDs in a slip case with the tracklisting printed on the CD as I don't know what I'm listening to and have to keep stopping the CD to know what track I want to refer to in my review, so include it on the inlay or PR too. Same goes for contact details, put them both on the CD & the PR... And at least put them somewhere! I've been unable to let so many bands know when their review is out because they've forgotten to do this!

### Compiling A Press Pack

Below is a list of items you'd expect to find in a typical bands press pack...

**CD** - Obviously, this is the most important thing! Ensure it is labelled, and if you prefer, you can create special sample CDs, rather than sending out full-length demos, as, not everyone you send the CD to has the time to listen to an entire album. Xenia, lead singer of New York band Sky Salt, tells us that her band makes "special demos with CD case, label, and card with track listing. Each CD contains three 1-minute song samples with each song fading into its catchiest part. I understand how annoying it can be, listening to 45-second intros!" Beware of sending less-supported formats such as vinyl, not everyone has a record player, and you may not get reviewed because of this.

**The Photograph** - A colour or black and white shot of the band. "Doesn't have to be huge or a certain size - just a clear picture with all band members looking directly at the camera" - Xenia, Sky Salt.

**The Biography** - One page detailing the history of the band.

**Press Cuttings** - If your band is lucky enough to have received some press already, it is important to include copies of it in

your press pack - people will want to know what others have said about your music. You can just list quotes from reviews, or include entire articles if you prefer, although quotes are probably better as you can choose the best bits of reviews to print! Here's some more advice from Xenia: "If you have [no press] at least come up with a non-existent magazine and write your own quote. This is what we did back in the day when we were just starting out and had no press. Some may say it's dishonest but think about it! The only reason you want to see press clippings is to get a general idea of what the band sounds like! If a fake quote reflects it, then it's all good, in my opinion!"

**Contact Information** - Don't forget to let these people know how they can reach you! Make sure your contact information (e-mail address, phone number etc.) is on all the items in case they get separated.

**The Novelty Item** - OK, this last one is optional, and, can sometimes work against you. A novelty item is a promotional object, somehow related to the band, that may help the press pack (and therefore the band) stand out against others, demonstrate the bands personality and/or show people that you guys have a sense of humour. Shari, editor of long-running UK independent magazine/fanzine *Black Velvet* ([www.blackvelvetmagazine.com](http://www.blackvelvetmagazine.com)), has received her fair share of novelty items over the years: "I've been sent a stick of rock by one band (which I didn't eat because I'm vegan) and a bottle of beer by another (which I didn't drink because I don't drink). I think it's 'fun' to receive something 'free' (a lot of bands send badges and stickers too) but if they're of no use to you then it's a bit pointless."

This picture is of a 'deluxe' press pack created by the 'fairytale rock band' Sky Salt ([www.skysalt.com](http://www.skysalt.com)). It contains 2 auto-graphed CDs, postcards, stickers, a biography printed on parchment paper (to continue the bands fairytale theme), a selection of press clippings compiled and printed as a newspaper called 'The Sky Salt Times' and a sachet of sweet-smelling bath salts (Sky Salt - geddit?!). The pack comes presented in a clear lunchbox filled with shredded tissue paper. This is an exquisite example of a carefully constructed press pack - the band have managed to exploit the 'fairytale' theme by using parchment paper to make the bio look like an old story, and included a novelty item that relates to the bands name. I think any writer/zine editor would be delighted to receive this!



### Some Final Pointers...

According to Shari, bands in the US create better press packs than their UK counterparts: "A lot of them use a nice glossy A4 type folder, put in an 8x10 promo photo, have the CD in one side, a business card, then a few sheets with the bio, press quotes and photocopied articles etc. I don't think the UK is as glamorous when compiling CD packs - although it can depend on the band or label."

Remember, even if you don't have much money, you can still create something basic, but professional - ensure your pages are typed/printed neatly, with no spelling mistakes, and that your CD is labelled and in a sleeve/case, a publication such as *Black Velvet*, for example, will not review CDRs with no sleeve. If you are including photographs, just ensure they are not blurry/over-exposed, it doesn't really matter how big they are. You don't have to have a swish-looking folder, but if you don't want to get your press pack creased/wrinkled in the post, transparent document folders are pretty cheap to buy; failing that, get some card/paints/crayons/whatever and create your own d.i.y folders!

Lastly, you should know who you are sending your press pack to. If it's a magazine or record label - you should be familiar with the music they cover/promote, also, ensure you have read any applicable submission guidelines; in fanzines, this is usually on the inside front cover (or website) and states what type of things you should send in for review i.e. *Black Velvet* does not review Mp3s or vinyl, *Bubblegum Slut* covers glam/metal/trash bands, and doesn't give favourable reviews to Emo & punk-pop bands! As Jane, editor of *Pussy Rock* - a fanzine about female artists, ([www.pussyrock.co.uk](http://www.pussyrock.co.uk)) concludes: "I feel it's not only a waste of my time but a waste of the bands time if I'm sent something that is completely irrelevant to what I'm doing... bands should check before they send you a demo."

Hopefully these tips will have given you some ideas for compiling your bands press pack or release, but remember - music is the most important thing! Even with the most beautifully constructed press pack, if the music is awful, you won't receive good (if any) press at all! The trick is getting the balance right; as Shari says, "Obviously it's mostly about the music - without good music the band is nowhere - but I think you really should back it up with good presentation."

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