


Making your own mark(eting)





Former *Apprentice* star, **Kimberly Davis** recently caught up with "odd pop" rockers, The Hoosiers, to find out how they stole back their identity from the record labels and created a new, innovative way of marketing their product

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The Hoosiers burst onto the music scene in 2007 with their number one album, *The Trick to Life*,

which featured the hits *Goodbye Mr. A* and *Worried About Ray*.

Shortly afterwards, they chose to walk away from their record company and become an independent SME.

Since then, Irwin, Alan, Martin, and Sam have been redefining how music is marketed, sold, and succeeds. I caught up with them to find out just how they did it.

HOW OLD WERE YOU WHEN YOU STARTED?

I: Alan and I were in our first band when we were about 15 years old. We met through friends - the old fashioned way. It feels novel now in the days of reality TV shows like *The X-Factor*.

HOW LONG BEFORE YOU FOUND SUCCESS?

I: It was 13 years until we got anywhere. We ended up signing on benefits and working very bad jobs.

HOW DID YOU TURN THINGS AROUND?

I: One of the main things was we started to work with the right people. I wouldn't recommend throwing yourself into it if you haven't got the right kind of infrastructure or people to support you.



The Hoosiers, left to right: Irwin Sparkes, Sam Swallow, Alfonso Sharland and Martin Skarendahl

WHEN DID YOU KNOW YOU'D MADE IT?

I: When we got paid [laughter].

A: There was the day when we signed the record deal. As a kid playing music, that's what you dream of.

YOU CREATED A UNIQUE SELLING POINT TO DESCRIBE YOUR MUSIC. WHAT WAS IT?

I: It was "odd pop".

A: We didn't want to be tied with the pop lyrics at the time, which were usually always about love and that. So that was what was "odd" about it.

I: As guys in our 20s, it wasn't interesting to just have very generic chord changes, singing songs about loving someone until the sun runs cold. We had to capture each other's imagination. There had to be a certain "oddity" to it.

THE TRICK TO LIFE WENT TO NUMBER ONE IN THE CHARTS. DESCRIBE THAT SUCCESS?

M: I think, at the time, we got a little too caught up in it. Obviously, there are a lot of enjoyable moments, like playing a big festival for the first time. It's exciting. But you go from making music to

»»» The more we interact and give on social media, the more we get. There's a lesson there for any business

selling music. You become a full-time salesman. It's not about the music anymore and that was hard.

HOW DID IT FEEL GOING INTO THE SECOND ALBUM, THE ILLUSION OF SAFETY?

A: It felt really pressurised. Suddenly there's a cash cow here and it needs to be properly milked. It was an awful lot of pressure to create hits. It was not a very creative environment to be in.

HOW DID THAT PRESSURE AFFECT YOU?

A: I think everyone second-guessed everything. Once a little bit of doubt creeps in, suddenly everything's being questioned.

WHAT WERE THE CONSEQUENCES?

I: We took too long. It was a couple of years and pop years are like dog years. Radio had moved on. Then the guy who signed us, literally, the week of the release, left the label. The guy who takes over has got his other bands, who he wants to prove himself with. He would take the money allocated for our marketing spend and put it on his acts. So, you end up with a toothless campaign. A lot of people were

unaware that we even had a second album.

WHAT DID YOU DO?

A: Our management said, "Look, you have an album. See if you can get the album back from the record label. Leave the label and see what you can do on your own." Which is what we tried. But we felt like we were running uphill through mud.

HOW DID YOU BOUNCE BACK?

A: We thought that, with fresh material and our energy, we could sell something. We now had control, so we started writing the third album.

HOW DO YOU COMPARE THAT ALBUM, THE NEW FROM NOWHERE, TO YOUR OTHER ALBUMS?

M: I think in terms of albums, it's the best one. The other albums have very shiny production, which happened that way because we didn't have enough knowledge or control to make it sound the way we wanted at the time. If you don't have the vision then you're going to be taken for a ride by whoever is employed by the producer or engineer.



»»» Our management said, "Look, you have an album. Get it back from the record label and see what you can do on your own." So we did."

HOW DID YOU FIND THE FINANCE TO FUND THIS ALBUM WITHOUT THE LABEL BEHIND YOU?

A: We decided to crowd fund. We were involved with the fans, so we didn't need to get the loan with loads of interest from the record company, which leaves you free to make your own decisions.

Once you've done your pre-sales, then you know how much money you've got to spend, instead of the other way around where you spend and hope. It's a bit like Dell computers. They sell and then build the computers to order. In a similar way, we sell and then market, knowing what we've got, so you're never going to be in a hole. It's nice as it takes the pressure out of it. All we need is a baseline of fans to buy this.

WERE YOU EVER WORRIED THEY WOULDN'T COME?

A: Admittedly, there was a point where we thought, "maybe nobody will buy it".

S: But once they bought it in advance, you really want them to like it because they've already parted with their hard earned cash.

Previously, if you were going to appeal to a new audience, you'd have your singles and then people would buy the album thinking, "I like those songs so hopefully I'm going to like whatever else I get", whereas this time around they are buying it without any idea whatsoever.

So when we started getting messages when the album came out, saying "Oh it's great", it was a relief.

SOMEWHERE IN THE DISTANCE IS AN AMAZINGLY INSPIRATIONAL ANTHEM. IT SEEMS LIKE YOU'RE IN A MUCH MORE POSITIVE PLACE NOW?

A: It's nice to know that whatever situation you're in, somewhere out there, there's hope. Nobody can deny that. "Sweet, sweet hope, somewhere in the distance."

THE VIDEO FEATURES YOUR FANS, WHICH WAS PART OF A BRILLIANT MARKETING PLAN. WHAT INSPIRED YOU TO DO THAT?

I: We really wanted to get people involved in the project, because, without them, there isn't anything. All those people on our Facebook, Twitter, and mailing lists, they matter massively. We really need them and we wanted to make a collaborative video with them.

THAT WASN'T THE ONLY CREATIVE MARKETING YOU DID. TELL ME ABOUT YOUR SPECIAL NEWSPAPER?

I: It seemed like we were missing an obvious trick having an album called *The News From Nowhere*, to not have a newspaper from

somewhere. The idea was to write credits and thank everybody who had pre-ordered the album for already giving us their money and good faith.

Also, we allowed them to take up space and have their own adverts in there.

WHAT OTHER ORIGINAL MARKETING DID YOU DO TO RAISE MONEY?

I: We have items on offer on our website. One of the packs we were giving away included people coming down to the studio and we would record them. On *Fidget Brain*, there's a point where there are group vocals and that's actually fans who came down to the studio.

WHAT'S BEEN THE RESPONSE?

I: The response has been overwhelming. Especially seeing the number of people on social networks growing. The more we interact and give, the more we get. There's a lesson there for any business.

Without tools like social media, most bands wouldn't have the facility to be able to get a record directly to the people that want it. You would fade away and that would be it.

IT SEEMS YOUR MODEL IS CATCHING ON AT THE LABELS?

I: Now there's projections from the head of Warner Entertainment talking about this segment of the pie being self-funded and directed to your consumer market going up to around £2 billion. I think that's very encouraging. We're very lucky to have fans that are keeping the fire going.

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Contact: To learn how Kimberly can help you **MAKE MONEY FROM YOUR MARKETING**, please visit www.sarsaparillamarketing.com or call 02071479960