

D.I.Y. in Decline? The evolving role of managers as key intermediaries in the contemporary music industry

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Digital technologies have fundamentally altered the way music is produced, promoted, distributed and consumed. Musicians have gone from cogs in the major label system to entrepreneurs who are independently responsible for the entire range of creative and non-creative tasks. According to the Canadian Independent Recording Artist Association (CIRAA), 95% of all musicians in Canada operate under the 'Do It Yourself' (D.I.Y.) model and are not affiliated with major or independent record labels. Coupled with the decline of record sales, the rise of D.I.Y. has also displaced a range of skilled specialists, including engineers, producers and managers who thrived under the golden era of major label hegemony (Leyshon 2009). As a result, while musicians often celebrate the emancipatory nature of the D.I.Y. model, music professionals and intermediaries lament their own apparent obsolescence. Yet, a decade after the introduction of Napster and the so-called 'MP3 Crisis,' some musicians are becoming disenfranchised with the demands and risks associated with the D.I.Y. model. Drawing on 65 interviews with musicians, managers and key informants in Toronto this paper explores the 'dark side' of D.I.Y. and demonstrates that some independent musicians are 'getting help' from a range of collaborators and contracted specialists including fashion designers, web designers, and publicists. By curating and connecting these collaborators and articulating the strategic vision of their musical clients, I argue that managers are re-emerging as key intermediaries in the contemporary music industry. In so doing, I also assert that the specificities of local labour markets mediate these relationships and catalyze innovative business models.