

Steven Trachtenbroit

Publicist, Big Hassle Media

by CAROLINE HORN

Steven Trachtenbroit claims that he can't play a note—but he still knew early on that he wanted to work in the music industry. While attending the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, he combined classes in music, business, and legal studies to create his own major. After college he became the first intern at a new indie public relations firm called Big Hassle Media. Within a few months of interning, Steven became friendly with a then-unsigned and unknown band, helping them promote local shows and build a buzz with the national media. That band would become the Strokes. As the Strokes gained meteoric success, he became a national publicist and went on to sign such acts as Regina Spektor, Incubus, Matthew Sweet, Dr. Dog, the Whigs, Mike Gordon of Phish, Backstreet Boys, and many more. Now celebrating 10 years at Big Hassle, Steven took time out from a festival to chat with *Music Alive!* about his career.



MA! WHAT IS YOUR TYPICAL WORK DAY LIKE?

ST: It's mostly reaching out to writers, editors, and websites and educating people about your bands—finding every opportunity you can for your clients.

WHAT'S THE HARDEST THING TO GET ACROSS TO THE PRESS?

The hardest thing is actually just getting the press to listen. There are so many CDs coming through all the time that it's hard to get to the top of their pile.

HOW HAS PUBLICITY WORK CHANGED OVER THE LAST SEVERAL YEARS, AS THINGS HAVE BECOME MORE DIGITAL?

When I started, I was on the phone constantly, and now it's much more emailing. It saves the label a lot of money, which is a good thing because they can put that money into tour support.

HOW DIRECTLY DO YOU WORK WITH THE ARTIST?

I'm with them at all times. I travel with them, I'm at the shows, I'm at photo shoots, awards shows, TV tapings. I'm the guy who introduces the artist to the public and everyone has to go through me to get to the artist. I'm the person closest to them aside from management.

WHAT'S THE MOST FUN PART OF YOUR JOB?

Being on stage while my band is performing. You're watching thousands of kids sing every word to every song and you

know your band was once playing in front of 5 people and now they're playing in front of 50,000. And you know that's because of you—you helped with that.

WHAT'S THE HARDEST PART OF YOUR JOB? Calling people about a band I absolutely love and having them not care.

WHAT SKILLS DO YOU NEED TO BE A GOOD PUBLICIST?

You have to be extremely organized and detail-oriented. You always have to be able to prepare your artist. On photo shoots, for example, you need to know if there's going to be a stylist, what kind of clothes there will be, the sizes, and make sure that the styles suit the artist. For TV tapings, you want to make sure your artist knows the time limit. For *Letterman* it's 3 1/2 minutes, so if the song being performed is 4:15, you have to make sure there's a shorter arrangement or edit. Even if a band is walking out onto a red carpet at an awards show, you need to know who they're going to be speaking with when they get there.

Another thing that's really important is creative problem-solving. Things change at the last second and you have to roll with it. You can't stop and complain—you've still got to do that interview, you've still got to make that plane. Or if you're sending a CD and calling somebody who's not responding, what other opportunities can you explore? If one way doesn't work, you have to try another.

WHAT ADVICE DO YOU HAVE FOR KIDS WANTING TO BREAK INTO PUBLICITY?

If you have the opportunity, even as an intern, take it and run with it. With every task that you get, do the best job that you can with a big smile. I was the first Big Hassle intern and was always the first one to raise my hand. That got me to the Strokes and got me introduced to Regina and Incubus. Also, treat everyone the way you want to be treated—you don't know where they're going to be in 3 or 4 years. I treat everyone equally, whether you're the editor of *Rolling Stone* or a freelancer for a college paper. Treat everyone with respect. 🎧