

# Berlin School of Sound

MUSIC MARKETING 2026

11 Case Studies for Music Students

A Complete Guide to Building a Music Career in the Modern Era

Berlin School of Sound · ACUD Kunsthaus, Berlin

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## Case Study #1: Marketing > Music (40/60)

### ORIGINAL TRANSCRIPT

Today, good marketing is more important than good music. I've said this on TikTok — being good on social media is more important than being a good musician. Dustin Boyd responded to that video and invited me onto his podcast My 4 Cents Podcast where we debated this, and it was a genuinely fascinating conversation. I've seen Ryan Tedder — who is my music mentor, never met him personally but I love listening to him on music podcasts — share a clip recently where he says that in 2026 there are major artists releasing B or B-minus records and they're hits, or they perform like hits, because the artist is that big or because the marketing around the song is that good. He said it's never really happened in music before that a B-minus record works as a hit. He said there are songwriters in Nashville and LA sitting in rooms talking about tracks saying 'I would never have pitched this song — it's objectively not a good track' and yet it's a hit. I've been saying this for years. Before I jumped on TikTok I was complaining about it to my wife. I think it has something to do with the social media era. I'm a proponent of posting — I tell people constantly, if you want to make money from music you have to post. But TikTok and the fact that there are no more gatekeepers has destroyed pop music. Once you removed the gatekeepers it became really hard to break artists. It's basically all about the artists themselves and how well they do on social media or how good their team is around them. It's about marketing. If someone tells you it's not like that and it's all about good music, they're either naive or they don't know enough about the industry. If you believe good music breaks on its own — good luck. Unless you're working hard to promote that music, I think you need to work harder on promoting than on writing. I'd say it's about 40% how good the music is and 60% how good the marketing is.

→ Marketing is more important than music (60% vs 40%)

### KEY INSIGHT

Without gatekeepers, success depends on promotion. Artists are no longer judged by music quality alone. Even B-minus records can be hits with the right marketing.

### KEY POINTS

- Good music alone is not enough — you need to be able to sell it
- Team and marketing beat solo talent

- Ryan Tedder says it directly: B/B-minus = hits today
- Remember: 40% music, 60% marketing

## PRACTICAL TIPS FOR STUDENTS

- Spend 60% of your time on marketing, 40% on production
- Build a team around yourself
- Learn social media from the ground up
- Don't wait for industry recognition

## Case Study #2: The Experience Era & Personal Connection

### ORIGINAL TRANSCRIPT

What attracts your attention to a new artist? Artists need to find new ways to engage with the medium through which they sell music. Honestly, I feel we're now in the experience era — our eyes are saturated, our ears are saturated, the only thing that isn't saturated is CONTACT — that personal feel, the ability to feel connected. One thing that has really helped is that we do a lot of meet and greets. Even if you're just starting out you should be doing this — engaging the community you have. It's real, it's not just for concerts. Now it has to be more personal to actually convert people. Because you're fighting for their attention. Why should I give you my attention? Obviously the first thing is that it should be amazing music. But people need a reason to support you. And if you're just starting out you have to do everything you can.

→ It's not about music — it's about experience and personal connection

### KEY INSIGHT

Eyes saturated, ears saturated — the only thing missing is CONTACT. Meet & greets aren't for celebrities — they're for everyone. People need a reason to support you.

### KEY POINTS

- Build experiences, not just songs
- Personal contact > promotion
- Engage your micro-community
- People ask: Why should I give you my attention?

### PRACTICAL TIPS FOR STUDENTS

- Do meet & greets (even online)
- Be accessible to your fans
- Build a community, not just followers
- Discord/Telegram/WhatsApp groups with fans

## Case Study #3: Catalog > Hit

### ORIGINAL TRANSCRIPT

If a song gets 100 thousand streams per day and that goes to you, you'll be fine — you'll be making money from music. My biggest song in terms of highest streaming day was Icy Pop and that was around 388 thousand streams in a single day. That was my maximum ever. But I have a catalog so I managed to do over 1.5 billion streams total thanks to the catalog. A lot of people think a hit means like a billion streams but I say — add up my entire catalog, what's the difference? The money is the same. If you have one song doing 1 million streams a month or I have 20 songs doing the same thing — that's the same money. My idea was simply: how do I make a living? I wasn't looking for industry validation from a hit. I just wanted to earn.

→ You don't need one mega-hit. Catalog does everything.

### KEY INSIGHT

100k streams per day = you'll be making money. 1 billion streams = the same as 20 songs at 50M each. The math is the same — but the catalog is more stable.

### KEY POINTS

- Goal: 100k+ streams per day (total)
- Don't wait for one hit — build a catalog
- 1 song with 1M/month = 20 songs with 50k each
- Recognition ≠ Money

### PRACTICAL TIPS FOR STUDENTS

- Release regularly, not one-off
- Build catalog, not singles
- Track metrics from day 1
- Don't wait for industry validation

## Case Study #4: Teasing & Hooks — Right Timing, Right Reasons

### ORIGINAL TRANSCRIPT

Practically every TikTok video that ever went viral for me performs well right away — song is out? The song is never pre-teased out. We found the sweet spot for teasing which is about two weeks. Back in 2021 and 2022 you could tease a song for three months total and it could work. I did it many times and it worked really well. I think people just got bored of it. It's annoying to have a song you want to listen to and you hear the chorus 100 times. It's like overplaying on the radio. With sad songs we came up with hooks — how to reach people who've been through a specific kind of heartbreak? One word we focused on a lot was narcissist — everyone has been through being with a narcissist. It doesn't matter how the song starts, they keep listening because they think yeah, my ex was a narcissist. Super important that the song mirrors that hook. It can't be clickbait, it has to be true. There was an era on TikTok where clickbait worked — people had weird things in the background of teaser videos. People commented 'yo what is that guy doing in the background?' It boosted the algorithm but didn't affect streams because everyone watched the video because of some weird guy doing something weird. It wasn't about the song at all. We don't care about going viral for the wrong reasons. It has to go viral for the right reasons. That's why I haven't gotten a lot of hate — because the people watching the videos are there to be there and we brought them there.

→ Viral for the right reasons > viral for the wrong reasons

### KEY INSIGHT

Sweet spot for teasing: 2 weeks (before it was 3 months — overplay). Viral clickbait ≠ streams. Hook must be emotionally true, not manipulative. One word: narcissist = instant recognition.

### KEY POINTS

- Tease 2 weeks before release
- Hook = one word/emotion (not several)
- Go viral for the RIGHT reasons
- Alignment: teaser = reality of the song
- 'My ex was a narcissist' > clickbait guy

### PRACTICAL TIPS FOR STUDENTS

- Plan teasers: 2 weeks before release
- Find the one key emotion of your song

- Test hooks in drafts before release
- Don't play with clickbait — earn genuine listeners

## Case Study #5: Email List = Guaranteed Baseline (200–300k Day One)

### ORIGINAL TRANSCRIPT

I can guarantee that every time I release something I'll get around 200 to 300 thousand streams on Spotify on the first day regardless of anything. We have a Laylo group where we collected phone numbers, emails, all that stuff. I think we have 400 thousand emails. So every time something comes out we do a blast. It's incredible. I have 400 thousand emails and they're here for you. What can I do for you? That's the kind of thing that excites me. How did you get 400 thousand emails? The biggest thing is that every tour I've ever done or pre-save when you sign up for a pre-sale — everything goes through Laylo. I started doing pre-saves super early. I started when I was releasing my first song. Unfortunately this method doesn't work quite as well anymore. You'd tease a song for a month and a half and you had a pre-save link. You'd post the pre-save link once or twice a week in stories and tell people to pre-save. I had one song that got 110 thousand pre-saves. That's where a lot of the numbers came from. When you do tours people sign up for the pre-sale and when you sell 20, 40 thousand tickets those things add up over time. It's super important as an indie artist that people know a song is out because sometimes I don't get Spotify playlisting right away. But I can guarantee that every time I release something I get 200 to 300 thousand streams on Spotify on the first day. That's now my baseline that I can guarantee.

→ I have 400k emails. Every release = 200–300k streams guaranteed (without Spotify playlist)

### KEY INSIGHT

Laylo = hub for emails + pre-saves + pre-sales. Email list = independence from Spotify playlisting. Pre-saves were huge (110k on one song). Now: list makes the baseline, the rest is organic.

### KEY POINTS

- Collect emails from DAY 1 (tours, pre-sales)
- Post pre-save link 1–2x in stories
- 400k emails = 200–300k first day guaranteed
- Indie artists NEED this — don't count on Spotify
- Tours = not just money but emails + pre-sales

## PRACTICAL TIPS FOR STUDENTS

- Set up Laylo (or alternative)
- Pre-save link in bio + stories
- Tours/events = email collection opportunity
- Email list = your independence from algorithms

## Case Study #6: Facebook/Instagram Ads — Step by Step

### ORIGINAL TRANSCRIPT

Want your song to explode on Spotify? Try this technique. The first thing you do is create a landing page and put only Spotify there. Add a pixel to track people. Then go to Facebook Ads Manager, click create and make an engagement campaign. Make a manual engagement campaign. Give the campaign a name and go to campaign budget and select daily budget. Give the audience a name and go where it says conversion location — set it to website, maximum conversions, select the pixel. Go to budget and schedule at the end — select start and end date. Go to audience controls and do advantage plus audience, then click where it says switch to original audience options. Go to the third option — further limit reach. Add your countries — there's a specific list of countries that if you target you'll go viral. Add age, gender and interests. Languages after. Transparency. Then show more options — platforms — edit — turn off everything except Instagram because Instagram has the best results. Feeds — turn off Instagram profile feed, leave feed and explore. Instagram stories — leave on. Search results — turn off. Continue. Give the ad a name. Facebook and Instagram. Use existing post. Select the post from Instagram. Call to action — Listen Now — add the landing page. Publish the ad. You can duplicate ad sets and run a bunch of different ads but this is basically the setup if you want a song to explode.

→ A concrete workflow to blow up a song on Instagram/Spotify

### KEY INSIGHT

Landing page + pixel = tracking. Manual Engagement Campaign. Specific countries + interests = viral. Instagram > Facebook. Placements matter (Reels/Stories/Explore YES, Search/Profile NO).

### KEY POINTS

- Setup: Landing page + pixel
- Campaign: Facebook Ads Manager → Manual Engagement
- Audience: Website conversion, Max conversions, Original
- Placements: Reels, Stories, Explore (NOT Search/Profile)
- Creative: Existing post + Listen Now CTA

### PRACTICAL TIPS FOR STUDENTS

- Set up landing page + pixel
- Create ads from existing posts

- Test different countries/interests
- Monitor placements
- Duplicate + scale what works

## Case Study #7: 2 Ways to Grow (No Money vs With Money)

### ORIGINAL TRANSCRIPT

There are essentially two ways to grow as an artist in 2026. One doesn't require money but requires a hell of a lot of your time and requires posting pure volume on social media. And the other requires investment. There are so many other ways to break through but everything requires investment. One is doing something for free which requires pure volume like Alex Warren or Somba or Benson Boone. All those artists posted pure volume before getting investment to have viral moments. With investment there are multiple growth paths. You can grow with ads, you can play live tours but you need support. You can play solo live but it usually takes years to pay off. But Olivia Dean took 6 years of touring but she had a major label. She had investment and a lot of it. There are bands that have money from personal finances. A lot of that in the industry. Then there's another way — chaotic good — you can pay someone to basically post pure volume for you. You can pay. If you don't have investment, if you don't have someone who will give you hundreds of thousands of pounds, then basically the only way to grow is to do it yourself. That's the truth as I see it. If you don't have money, if you don't have investment, you have to do it yourself. If you have a lot of money and a lot of investment you have many options. The problem is that 99% of artists don't have hundreds of thousands of pounds of investment. If you're sitting and waiting for lottery luck the chances of breaking through in music are very small. Unfortunately you have to do it yourself. Pure volume game because there's no other way.

→ There are 2 ways. One requires time. One requires money. Choose.

### KEY INSIGHT

Path #1 (NO MONEY): Pure volume + time (Alex Warren, Somba, Benson Boone). Path #2 (WITH MONEY): Ads, touring, hire services. 99% of artists have no investment. Lottery luck ≠ strategy.

### KEY POINTS

- Path #1: Post constantly, create viral moments, takes time
- Path #2: Pay for ads, tour support, hire services
- Olivia Dean: 6 years touring + major label
- 99% of artists: 0 investment = DIY or bust
- If you have no money, you have to do it yourself

## PRACTICAL TIPS FOR STUDENTS

- Realistically assess your resources
- NO MONEY? Pure volume + consistency
- HAVE MONEY? Invest strategically
- Don't wait for lottery luck
- Choose a path, commit fully

## Case Study #8: Organic Breakthrough = Naivety. Modern Warfare.

### ORIGINAL TRANSCRIPT

If you still think music breaks organically in 2026 you're either naive or fighting reality. The outrage around the Chaotic Good interview with Billboard is super interesting because I think it brings that naivety to the surface. A lot of artists and industry people seem outraged as if it's underhanded or fake or a betrayal of artistry. It's simply the clearest explanation of how music gets big in 2026. You do it yourself like Alex Warren and Somba, or you pay someone to do it. Every other kind of marketing doesn't work now. If you think you'll break through via press and radio it's like coming to a battlefield with a sword and shield when the opposition has machine guns and bombs. This is modern warfare and you're coming with outdated methods. It doesn't work. It only works for artists who are already doing 60 mph. And even for them they still work with Chaotic Good because they have a methodical approach. They have success stories. If you can make a track go viral you'd obviously pay for that, right? They're not the only ones. There are plenty of platforms. This is Modern Warfare — you have to be in the trendy because if you're not you'll be left behind. Discovery is not through magazines and radio. It's through short-form content — TikTok, Instagram, YouTube Shorts. These platforms reward velocity and pure volume. You do it for free or you pay for services like Chaotic Good. That's how it works in 2026. If you think music breaks organically, you're either naive or you're fighting reality.

→ If you think music breaks organically in 2026, you're naive.

### KEY INSIGHT

Organic ≠ reality in 2026. Press/radio = outdated. TikTok/Instagram/Shorts = battlefield. Visibility is ENGINEERED not organic.

### KEY POINTS

- WITHOUT strategy: Sword and shield
- WITH strategy: Full arsenal
- Discovery is through short-form content, not magazines
- TikTok/Instagram/Shorts reward velocity and volume
- If you're not doing this, you're at a disadvantage

### PRACTICAL TIPS FOR STUDENTS

- Stop waiting for organic

- Choose: DIY pure volume OR paid service
- Use the best marketing ammunition available
- Visibility = must-have
- If you're not doing this you're disadvantaged

## Case Study #9: 6–10 Years + Day Job = The Realistic Path

### ORIGINAL TRANSCRIPT

Many people getting into music don't realize that breaking through — both in Poland and abroad — takes on average 6 to 10 years. So if you started making music, released one project and assumed it would be your breakthrough project, you can forget about it. When I work with artists I very often suggest that after their first project they should find a steady job that will allow them to financially support their music career — because music doesn't pay, especially at the beginning when you have no catalog, no personal brand, no fans, no merch, no concerts. And the second piece of advice is: start educating yourself about marketing and promotion, observe what's happening, study trends, watch what other artists are doing — because you have to be your own marketer to build your personal brand and understand who your fans are and how to communicate with them.

→ Breaking through takes 6–10 years. Your first project won't be a hit.

### KEY INSIGHT

On average 6–10 years before you break through. Music doesn't pay at the beginning (no catalog, brand, fans). You need a day job to fund it. You have to be your own marketer.

### KEY POINTS

- Breaking through takes 6–10 years on average
- Don't expect your first project to be a hit
- Tip 1: Get a job to fund your music
- Tip 2: Educate yourself in marketing, study trends
- You have to be your own marketer

### PRACTICAL TIPS FOR STUDENTS

- Don't wait for a big break from your first release
- Get a job (with flexible time)
- Learn marketing in parallel
- Plan a 6–10 year career timeline
- Be your own CMO

## Case Study #10: Mentors & Network — Value Beyond Money

### ORIGINAL TRANSCRIPT

When I was still a student in London — it was around 2015, 2016 — I organised a concert where a Somali artist performed who had incredible talent. I instantly fell in love with her work. I wanted to be part of her team to help build her career. And that's what happened. It took us around 5 to 6 years to break her because in the UK it's a really tough process. At some point we needed more commercial and legal support. Our friend Rachel, who was then managing Easy Beez, invited us to a meeting with her lawyer Simon Long — a veteran when it comes to entertainment law in the UK. It took us around a year to build a relationship with Simon until he finally started actively supporting us. He arranged various songwriting sessions for us. Our artist had a songwriting session with Pal Barim — a legendary British songwriter who wrote most of the material for Sia, James Arthur, Enrique Iglesias — and this guy doesn't do sessions, but Simon called him, asked him, and of course he did the session. Eventually it came to the point that we were looking for a publisher, looking for a partner to release the material. And Simon arranged a meeting for us with Denzyl, who is the CEO of Platun — an incredible company that helped Georgie Smith, Billie Marten and Victoria Monet. And that shows the value Simon brought to our project — he didn't take money from us. He just believed in the project, believed in the team, believed in the artist and simply wanted to add his brick and help us build momentum.

→ I was looking for a publisher. I found a mentor. That changes everything.

### KEY INSIGHT

Mentors/network are worth more than money. Relationships > transactions. One recommendation opens doors. Believe in the project + team = people want to help.

### KEY POINTS

- 2015–16: Student in London, organised a concert
- 5–6 years: Building the career (hard process in the UK)
- Rachel → meeting with Simon (Entertainment Lawyer)
- Simon → songwriting with Pal Barim
- Simon → meeting with Denzyl (CEO Platun)

### PRACTICAL TIPS FOR STUDENTS

- Build relationships before any transaction
- Look for mentors, not just managers

- Everyone knows someone who can help
- One phone call can change a career
- Talent + passion → people want to help

## Case Study #11: Content Mindset — Opportunities Are Everywhere

### ORIGINAL TRANSCRIPT

Creating content for your music is often discussed as a huge burden. And I hear and read all the time what a massive weight it is to create content for your music. The honest truth is that until you build within yourself the mindset that opportunities to create it appear constantly and are practically everywhere, it will be very hard. I was reminded of a podcast I watched a while back with Conor Price and Nick D in the main role. The podcast was hosted by Conor's wife Brianna. Brianna is truly the architect of Conor's success. She came up with most of the concepts for his micro content, especially the famous Spin the Globe series. The material had a long-form character for YouTube and at some point Conor started talking about songwriting sessions with Nick. But he didn't get to build momentum because Brianna immediately sensed an opportunity to create an interesting TikTok. So she brutally stopped him. She said stop, we'll make a TikTok about this. She asked the question again — paraphrasing Conor — could you tell us about your experiences from the session with Nick and how you found working with him. And only then did she let him speak and he told the whole story. You get the concept. For example I'm driving home, I'm in a good mood. So I pull over for a moment, turn on one, two, three, four of my songs underneath and record the choruses in the car. How long does that take? 3 minutes, 5 minutes max. And I drive on. Or I'm walking past a nice location with someone. It's worth capturing that. I hand that person my phone, turn on my songs on their phone. Record to 1, to 2, to 3, done. I have another 3 pieces for my drawer. I'm going to work, I got in the elevator. I'll be riding for a moment. There's time to film content for at least one chorus. And that's exactly the mindset that comes naturally to some artists. And which unfortunately most of us simply have to develop.

→ Creating content is a burden — until you see that opportunities are everywhere.

### KEY INSIGHT

Content mindset ≠ hard work. Opportunities appear non-stop — you just have to SEE them. 3–5 minutes = enough for a TikTok. Natural for some, the rest of us have to develop it.

### KEY POINTS

- Story of Conor + Brianna: Brianna stopped the podcast
- Brianna: 'We're making a TikTok about this'

- Result: Viral TikTok from the response
- Content designer sees opportunities, artist executes
- Practical opportunities: in the car, on a walk, in the elevator

## PRACTICAL TIPS FOR STUDENTS

- Observe where micro content is born
- Always have phone + song ready
- Every moment = potential TikTok, Reel, Story
- Don't wait for a perfect setup
- Brianna mindset: artist creates, team extracts

## Summary

These 11 case studies form a complete guide to building a music career in 2026.

### KEY PRINCIPLES

- Marketing > Music (60/40 rule)
- Visibility is engineered, not organic
- Email list + catalog = baseline
- 2 paths: pure volume OR investment
- 6–10 years + day job = realistic
- Mentors > money
- Content mindset everywhere
- Consistency + education + strategy = success

### Berlin School of Sound

ACUD Kunsthaus · Veteranenstraße 21 · 10119 Berlin-Mitte

[berlinschoolofsound.com](http://berlinschoolofsound.com)

Use these insights to build your career with intention, strategy, and realistic expectations. Good luck. You've got this. 🎵