

BLANTON MUSIC'S 10 THINGS TO THINK ABOUT BEFORE DUPLICATING CD'S

Introduction

It frequently seems that the end object for a band or solo artist is to get their music on CD and release it as soon as possible. Having spent the last 35 years performing and working professionally in music, broadcast, and audio production, I empathize with the idea of pouring out one's soul, getting it in the can, packaging it, marketing it, distributing it, and profiting from it. All that can appear deceptively easy from a music consumer's point of view. I truly understand first-hand all of the hard work and effort that must be put forth by the musical artist just to create an "end product". Most bands have the general idea correct: cover or write, then record your best songs and release them via whatever means necessary. However, I would like to remind bands and artists to remember one simple, very important word, that when given some thought, can save a lot of wasted time, effort, and money. The word? **Impression**. As hackneyed as it may sound, you never get a second chance to make a first impression. Imagine this: you've invested innumerable hours of rehearsing, writing, arranging, and recording. You've, no doubt, spent a considerable amount of money to accomplish all of this; and then you release your CD. Your family, friends, and immediate fans are going to love it no matter what it sounds like or looks like. But what about that stranger who doesn't know you or your music? What about that booking agent that has to sift through hundreds of bands monthly to find the right one for the gig? What about that record company or distribution company hundreds of miles away that doesn't even know you exist? What about the producer that is looking for that perfect sound for their next movie soundtrack? Will it be you? Not very likely if you fail to make your musical message loud and clear when that first glimpse of your CD cover takes place, and when a listener attends to the first thirty seconds of your CD. Your CD is your calling card, so make it stand out! Every group or artist has their own unique sound, look, and personality that surrounds them, along with that special something or "vibe" about them - don't forget to package it with your CD! You know yourself best, so you should choose what that vibe is, and when you're ready to package your talent and release it on a CD, here are some things that you should think about before you start to plan it...

1. Purpose

Decide up front what you would like to accomplish by having a CD.

Are you trying to book gigs? Get radio airplay? Make extra income from CD sales? Get record companies interested in you? All of these? A combination of the above? It's very important to decide the purpose of your new CD, for it will help you budget your time and money properly, as well as help plan the quantity, quality and budget of your release. The graphic look of your CD and type of package can clearly help you achieve any and all of the above goals.

2. Content

How many songs will the CD have? Will you consider it an EP or LP, a 'pre-release'? Will it have an interactive press kit or bio? Will the artwork and liner notes be used to attract music fans or executives? Will it look and sound its worth for what somebody pays for it?

3. Image

Will you boast about your CD as being the low budget demo or will it be the "this looks like a million bucks" album? Will your artwork be black and white or full color? Will you have a single page cover or 20 page booklet? Will you print the lyrics? Do you need to print the lyrics? Will you simply use that snapshot of you at the jam room or will you have a professional photo shoot done? Do you need a pro photo shoot? Will you use your bands' logo? Do you even have a logo? Warning! Do not wait until the last minute to whip up a logo or make any of the above decisions- By simply planning correctly and not taking the "let's just get it done" path, you may prevent yourself from having boxes of CDs that you're really not happy with taking up space in your basement.

4. Mastering

Will your CD be sent to radio stations? Will its sound quality match its competition? Will the final product be edited and sequenced professionally? Note: Many times a band will take the approach of "Let's just see how the final mix comes out and then we'll decide if it needs to be mastered". If you're trying to pre-plan your CD it is very important to plan your budget allowances, including the cost of mastering. The mastering process can help give your release that highly misunderstood sound that makes it as "loud" as commercial CDs.

5. Duplication

Will you use the duplication process?

The duplication process is when a compact disc recordable (blank CD-R) is used in a "Cd burner" or duplicator and your music and/or data is recorded onto the blank CD-R. Sound quality and performance for the most part is the same (assuming a decent quality blank media is used), however, the CD's on face printing capabilities are limited. CD-R duplication is perfect for quick turn around and small run capability. Myth #1: "CD-R's aren't as good as replicated CD's (see below) - wrong! What is the preferred master most of the time? A CD-R! - If it's good for a master, it's good for a final product (again I must mention to use good quality blank CD-R's).

6. Replication

Will you use the CD replication process?

This process is when the Data from your CD master (usually a CD-R) is copied exactly to a glass substrate best known as a "glass master" via a laser beam recorder. After several steps the result is a nickel-plated stamper that will be used in an injection-molding machine that will "Stamp" the data image (in the form of pits and lands) in melted polycarbonate plastic. It is formed into the shape of a CD, cooled and then it receives a layer of mirror like aluminum and a coating of protective lacquer. The making and preparing of a glass master and stamper can be time consuming, but the CD manufacturing time goes rather quickly with an average CD manufacturing cycle time of 3 to 6 seconds per CD. Myth #2: "My band owns the glass master and stamper" - Wrong! Once a glass master is made and the stamper is created from it, the glass is polished to a blank and used for another job. The stamper will stay on file at the manufacturing facility and be used for re-orders. Most of the time, the stamper is made proprietary to the equipment in the same facility and can't be used at other manufacturers.

7. Graphics

What will the design of your CD be?

Who will do the graphics layout? What photos, logos, and images will be used? How many? You can have the best music in the world on your CD, but let's face it - Your cover or artwork is the first thing a person perceives of your image and music. Myth#3: "Someone in the band has a computer and graphics program, so we can take our time and design killer artwork" - wrong! Just because you own a screwdriver doesn't make you a mechanic. Just because you own a hammer doesn't mean you're a... get the picture? Most likely if you attempt your own artwork you'll lead yourself to believe that it came out great. But chances are if you don't have a full knowledge of the printing process and color separation as well as DPI & LPI and so on, you'll probably create a mess that you'll have to pay to have fixed so your end product will properly go to press.

8. Turn Around Time

When will you place your order and when will you expect it?

What date do you need it? What date do you really need it? Turn around time is how long it takes to get the finished product in your hands, ready to go. Do not confuse or combine layout, mastering and creation time with turnaround time. Once you've gone through the audio and graphics approval process, and you're sure you know what you'll be getting (usually after you've signed your final audio test master and final art proofs best known as 'matchprints'), your order will get in line and wait for its turn to be manufactured. Yep, first come, first served. Not to mention that people in line behind you can jump line by paying ridiculously high priced rush fees- a penalty some must pay due to lack of proper time management. I cannot stress this enough: **DON'T PLAN YOUR CD RELEASE PARTY BEFORE YOU HAVE YOUR CDs!!** Average turn time is 3-30 days all depending on what time of year you place the order (Forget about it at Christmas). When you plan a CD release, allow plenty of time for completion. You may even want to consider a short run of CD-R's at a duplicator that can promise a fast turn.

9. Cost

How much will you budget for your CD?

Will it be a low cost demo or the grand package? Will you pay cash or finance the order? Did you plan your payback schedule and how many CDs you'll need to sell to recoup your costs? Warning-: Myth #4: "Our CDs are the cheapest and best deal in town" - Beware of duplicators that are more interested in their wallet than a long-term customer relationship. There are many ways for companies to lower their price, but remember that the fruit of your hard work is what is at stake. Don't end up with a "cheesy" looking package, or CDs that skip because you had to get "the lowest price". At the risk of using another cliché, you will always get what you paid for.

10. Choosing A Duplicator

Who will manufacture your CD?

Are they local? Did you budget for shipping if your chosen duplicator is out of the area? Do they have a decent reputation? Do they manufacture their CDs right there? Do they offer financing? Do they penalize you for using credit cards? Have you seen someone else's product that they have manufactured? Did you visit their facility? Did they have a showroom (with samples of work they have completed)? How long have

they been in business? Do they focus only on making CDs? When choosing a CD duplicator use your best common sense. Don't get caught up in ad hype or pricing gimmicks that are there to only confuse you and get your job and deposit in the door. If something looks too good to be true, it usually is. However, there are several hard-working CD duplication companies out there that work assiduously to keep up their integrity and reputation, so once you find one and begin the process, hopefully, by understanding the process a little bit more you'll have smooth sailing and a successful release!



~Stephen Blanton