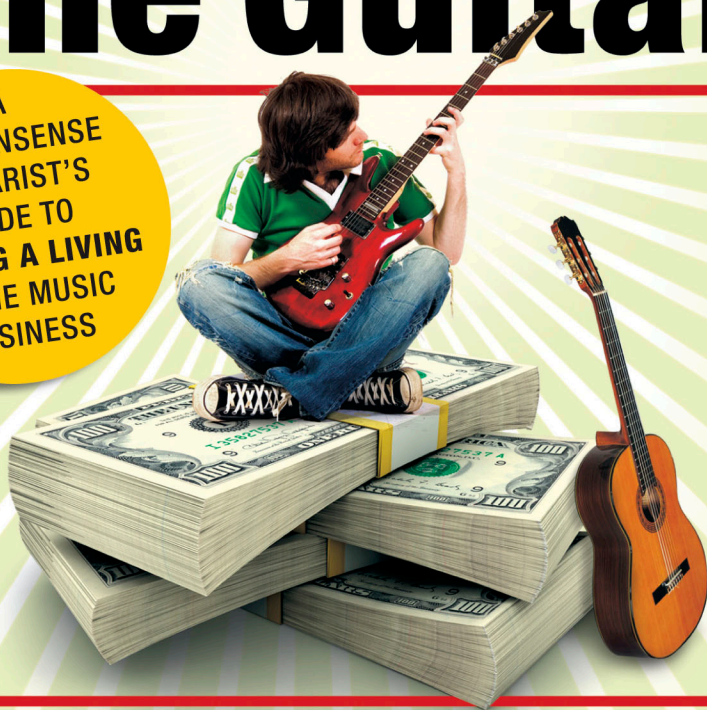


How to Make a **Million** **Dollars** Playing the Guitar

A
NO-NONSENSE
GUITARIST'S
GUIDE TO
MAKING A LIVING
IN THE MUSIC
BUSINESS



By Douglas Niedt

YOU WILL NEED HELP

Inevitably, even with thorough research and reading about each level of your pyramid, you will realize your knowledge is deficient in one or more areas. Some of these levels are very foreign to performing artist types. Find people who can help you with your weak areas. *Seek qualified outside help.* You cannot be an expert on each level of your pyramid. You may have to occasionally hire someone to advise you or do some of the work. If you do not have the money right now, perhaps you could convince them to take their payment later, once the sales of your product or project begin to roll in.

For example, if you are about to embark on a costly project such as a CD or concert tour, hire an accountant to help you with a budget and cash flow analysis. He can give you a clear estimate of the cost of the project, how many CDs or concerts you will need to sell, and how much marketing you can afford. Large projects always cost more and take longer than originally planned. A good accountant will point out expenses you may have missed. Many artistic types such as guitarists lack knowledge of accounting practices and are very lax about record keeping. Those who lack math and number skills can get into trouble

financially. Yes, an accountant will cost money. But the guitarist's lack of knowledge of accounting procedures and financial planning could result in financial chaos and ruin down the road.

Be sure your advisers are not financially needy. If an adviser is short on cash and you can't pay them on time, you might put them in a financial bind. After all, it's possible your sales won't begin to roll in when you thought they would. Be sure your advisers are specialists. Don't hire a generic attorney to advise you on a recording contract.

Make them a part of your team. That doesn't mean you have to employ them full-time. It means you should trust them. Be open about your plans. They must know everything that is going on. They should want to know everything that is going on. The more they know, the more they may be able to help you. They might even have insights into other areas of your career. If they are intimately familiar with who you are and what you are trying to achieve, they might come up with valuable advice even in areas outside their particular specialty.

And please: listen to your advisers! A common mistake is to ignore advice you don't like. But why pay for a good adviser and then ignore their advice? Patrick and Barbara Kavanaugh, in *Devotions from the World of Music*, relate this story about singer Johnny Cash, who took some hard-to-listen-to advice to heart:

Country great Johnny Cash's first big break was an opportunity to audition for Sam Phillips of Sun Records. Phillips helped launch the careers of Elvis Presley, Jerry Lee Lewis, Roy Orbison, B.B. King, and Ike Turner, among many others. Cash had high hopes because he knew Phillips could ignite his career. But Phillips was unimpressed. He turned

Cash down, telling him to sharpen his talents or give it up. It hurt deeply, but Cash took Phillips' advice and put in countless hours of practicing, writing, and rehearsing. Cash set up another audition with Phillips. Phillips was very impressed that Cash had followed his advice and had worked so hard to improve. He knew he was working with someone who knew the value of hard work and would follow his advice. He signed Cash to Sun. Soon, Cash's career was on its way.

But you must be careful. "Experts" are not always correct. Listen to your inner voice as well. Again, from Patrick and Barbara Kavanaugh:

When Tchaikovsky played his now famous Piano Concerto in B-flat Major (it was a dismal failure at its Russian premiere) for Nikolai Rubinstein, the finest pianist in Moscow, Rubinstein savaged it. It was unplayable, he said, broken passages, disconnected structure, unfixable. It was trivial and common. Rubinstein even accused him of having stolen passages from other people. Only one or two pages were worth keeping—the rest should be destroyed, he said. Of course Tchaikovsky was crushed. But his inner voice told him his piece was good. Better than good, it was a most excellent work. Realizing how distraught Tchaikovsky was at his comments, Rubinstein offered to perform it in concert if Tchaikovsky would alter it to his requirements. Tchaikovsky replied, "I shall not alter a single note." Today we are grateful Tchaikovsky did not follow the advice of the "expert."

Let's make a distinction. You do not always have to follow the advice of the expert. But don't ignore it. Listen to it, and let it be a factor in your decisions. Your adviser's job is to be certain you make an informed decision. If you are contemplating taking a gamble, your adviser's job is to make sure you understand the risk you are taking. Your job is to make the decision.

Some of you may come from a Christian perspective. There will be times when you believe God wants you to do something, even when others around you are telling you not to. In that kind of situation pray, study the Bible for guidance, and ask advice from trusted people. Ultimately of course, the decision is yours to make, and you must be ready to deal with the consequences. It can be difficult to step out in faith, especially if the decision makes life difficult for you or negatively affects someone close to you. But there comes a time when you must take a stand for the Lord and do what you believe He is calling you to do. In those tough times, remind yourself that the Lord has promised to never leave you or forsake you.

Do not be a one-man show. You may be a really smart person. You may have street smarts or you may have excelled in school. You may be a PhD. But, sorry if I am the first one to tell you this: you do not know everything. Use mentors and advisers. Bring together a team whose members have street smarts and school smarts. The shared education and experience of your team will be priceless to you on your career path. They will help you avoid missteps, potholes, or even bottomless ravines.