



# OFF THE RECORD

## A Guide to Press & Media

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# THE SKINNY

By Tallah Brash



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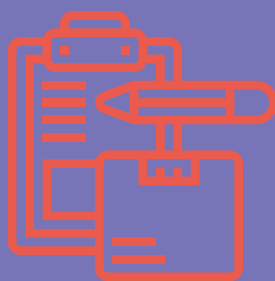


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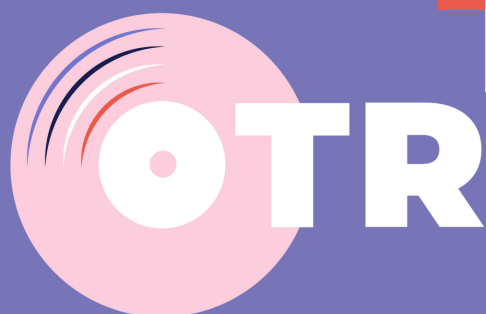


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When starting out in the music industry, the prospect of trying to get your music in the ears of the right people can seem daunting but don't let it overwhelm you. By the time you're thinking about getting in touch with journalists and broadcasters, you've already done much of the hard work in making good music. The next step is about telling stories and building connections to showcase that music to a wider audience.



Before you start contacting journalists and broadcasters there is some preparation to be done – without getting the basics right, you and your project could end up being overlooked and the opportunity for coverage could be lost. It's important to be organised before you start contacting anyone. As the saying goes: failing to prepare is preparing to fail.



Based on my experience at The Skinny for the past four years, where we run everything from online track and video premieres to interview features, having a nice demeanour on email, a strong press release, good-quality press photos and clickable streaming links to your music online are the fundamental keys to success.

Oh, and no big email attachments (we'll get this to later).



As an artist dealing with press, you should be ambitious but practical. Don't assume the bigger publications and radio stations are going to want to feature you right at the start of your career. Instead, start small and work your way up. Seek out local blogs, zines, magazines and newspapers; getting them onside will stand you in good stead further down the line and you never know where those features in smaller publications might lead you. Start small but aim big.

# Making Contact via Email

**You need to capture a journalist's attention** before they even hear your music. When it comes to emails, keep them short and snappy with a few sentences explaining:

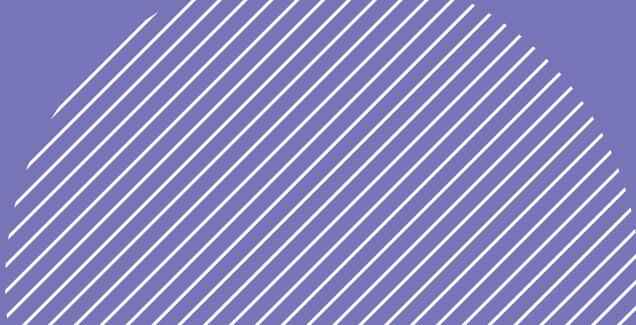
- Who you are.
- Where you're from.
- Why you're getting in touch.
- What you're working on.
- A streamable link to your music.
- A link to a press release with more information.



**Don't be scared to butter them up** (for example, tell them about a specific feature of theirs that you love), it shows that you've taken an interest in what they're doing. Similarly, if you think a journalist might like you because you think you're similar to an artist they've covered before, tell them that.

**When looking for the right person to contact**, places you might find this information (and more) include: a publication's pitching guide, staff directory and job titles. Never start an email with 'Dear Sir/Madam', find out names and email people directly.


**Don't send a blanket email to a list of contacts.** Take the time to email people individually, as that level of care will go a long way. But you don't need to write each email from scratch; focus on writing a really good template and personalise your correspondence from there. Be careful, you don't want to be emailing The Skinny telling them why you'd love to be featured in Clash, for example.



**Be sure to include an informative subject line** for your email, don't just say 'New Music' or 'Music Submission'. Something like the following would work: 'Edinburgh duo [insert band name here] to release debut EP' or 'Premiere Request: Dundee's [insert band name here] to release new music video'. Act as if the person you're getting in touch with has never heard of you before and think about what might get their attention.

**If it's impossible to find an email address,** it's okay to send a brief direct message via social media but keep it quick, be considerate of when you're getting in touch (don't contact anyone out of normal office hours) and be professional. Something like this would suffice: 'Hi [insert person's name here], I've made some music I'd love to send your way. Would you mind if I sent you an email?' If they say yes, ask for their email address and send them an email. Don't reply by sending them a link to your music there and then as it will likely be ignored. Don't chase them on social media if you don't hear back, send a follow-up email instead.

**Be yourself and be nice!** Manners cost nothing and simply being gracious, polite and courteous can get you a long way.



# Follow-up Emails



**If you've not heard anything back a week later**, send another email to get yourself to the top of an inbox. Replying to your last email will work best for this, alongside a polite, 'Just checking that you received this' and reaffirming that you'd love to be featured in [insert name of publication] if possible, maybe asking if there's anything else they need from you to help make it happen.

**Timing can be everything**, so think about when you're sending your emails. For example, if you're having no luck with sending all your emails on a Thursday night, try scheduling them for a Monday morning and see if it makes a difference. Maybe what you're sending isn't right on this occasion. Maybe the publication you're emailing doesn't run single reviews. (Note: The Skinny doesn't review singles.)

**Stop with the follow-up emails** if you've messaged someone about the same thing three times and still haven't heard back, assume it's a no and move on. Don't be disheartened or take it personally. A lot of journalists are on the receiving end of hundreds of emails a day, so it's not always possible to get back to everyone or cover everything. You're hopefully on their radar now at least, so keep on keeping on. Email them the next time you've got a new single, music video, collaboration, gig or album to tell them about and repeat the process.

# Creating a Timeline

**Every publication will work to a different timeline** based on their workflow, publishing schedule and staffing. As a monthly print publication, at The Skinny we generally work six to eight weeks in advance for covering new releases in the form of reviews or feature interviews. If you get in touch with us the week of your album coming out, chances are we won't be able to do anything, so you probably won't get a response. This will likely be completely different for a website like Alive & Amplified, or a new music show on community radio. Research is key to knowing when to send stuff out. Also, don't be scared to email an editor asking how far in advance they'd prefer to receive something for their consideration.

**If you're planning to release something at the end of a calendar month**, you'll likely need to factor in more lead time than if you were releasing at the start of a month. Even if your music is ready to go, don't hastily release it just because it's ready. Be patient with release timing so you can give yourself enough space to drum up some publicity.

**Factor in two to three months' lead time** for an EP, album or mixtape. Think about how you can maximise the coverage you get in that time, perhaps seeking out track premieres for singles and music videos, first plays on radio stations etc. Offer content to publications in a way that benefits both parties. Track premieres are a great example – a 48-hour exclusive of your new single on a website is a reason for people to go to that website during that time period, as well as an opportunity for you to grow your audience and reputation.

**Plan well and make the time** – there is a lot you can do in the lead up to a release coming out. Interest in covering your project will likely decrease after its release date, so take your time, plan a realistic schedule and try to get as much coverage in the lead-up from as many publications as you can.



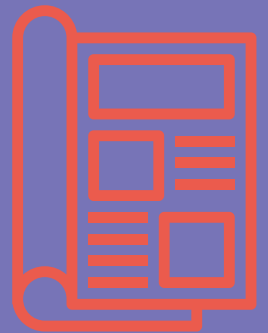


# Radio

When it comes to gaining radio airplay, use services like the BBC Introducing Uploader for the opportunity to potentially get your music played across the BBC. Be aware of the recent influx in local community-run radio stations, like Clyde Built Radio and Buena Vida Radio in Glasgow and EH-FM in Edinburgh. There are also student stations across the country, including SubCity in Glasgow, Fresh Air in Edinburgh and Air3 in Stirling.

Research the shows the stations are running, find out who the DJs are and make contact. If you secure some airplay, be sure to document it and share the news on social media. If media outlets can see that you appreciate the support, it makes a big difference.

# Physical Copies



Some radio DJs and journalists might appreciate receiving a physical copy of your release in the post. Getting your music onto the desks of the right people can be useful and this can be achieved with CDs you've burned yourself in the house, it doesn't have to be fancy. If you're creating CDs to hand out at events or post to people, be sure to write the name of your project on it along with your contact details (marker pen or snazzy stickers work well).

Similarly, when attending events with lots of industry types, like *Wide Days* or *Off the Record* you can maximise opportunities by having business cards including your contact details, links to your website and socials, and maybe even a download code, ready to hand out.



# Your Press Release

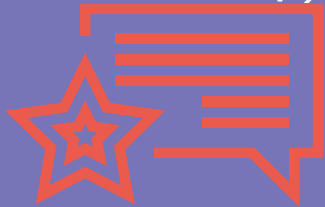
**Don't be put off by the thought of having to write one.** It doesn't have to be long or complicated – bloggers, broadcasters and editors just want to know a bit more about you and your project. For me, one page of information which includes a press photo and a link to your music is more than enough, especially if it's early in your music career. We don't want your life story in a press release, the highlights will do. If we want to know more, we'll likely ask for an interview.



**Don't forget to include details on where you're from,** and if you're not from Scotland but based here, say so. The Skinny is a Scottish publication and my eyes light up when I see someone is making music in Scotland (I have a label in my email inbox for Scottish artists). For example, I'm currently prioritising local acts over everything else, so omitting a seemingly simple piece of information could be the difference between someone listening to your music or not.

**We obviously also want to know about your project;** how long have you been making music, who's in your band, what does everyone in the band do? If it's a solo project, what do you do, what kind of music do you make, who would you cite as an inspiration? Some journalists might find a 'for fans of' (FFO) note in there useful too.

# Your Press Release

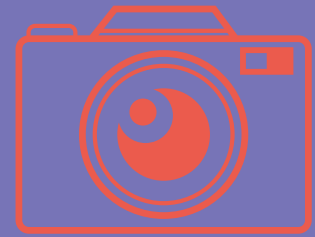


**As soon as you start getting positive press**, be sure to update your press release to include a few quotes you can attribute to publications or broadcasters. It helps make people take notice. Also, you're likely getting in touch because you have something new coming out that you want to promote, so don't forget to include information about that too. Did you collaborate with another artist or notable producer? Tell us! Assume we don't know anything about you or your project.

**You're simply trying to capture the attention of journalists and broadcasters** in the initial stages of reaching out to them. If you read back your draft and think, 'If I was sent that, I'd want to check it out', then you're probably in the right ballpark. Don't be afraid to ask your friends and family for their advice – see if they will read over your press release, help check for spelling mistakes and that links are working. They might point something out that you hadn't thought of! Second, third and fourth opinions are so valuable.

**Play to everyone's strengths** in seeking help with writing your release. If you're a solo artist who finds writing press releases difficult, find a friend to help you out. If you're in a band, find out which of you is the best writer and/or self-publicist, ask them to take the lead on this and support them.

# Press Photos



Be aware of print on different types of paper, and images in different sizes and aspect ratios.

**It's key that your press photos reflect your band/project**, so think about what kind of imagery might suit your sound and find a photographer who can make your ideas come to life. In the early days of your career this doesn't have to be expensive; find a friend who loves or studies photography and ask if they'd be up for working with you on it. Working with the people around you helps build a strong network. Give them free tickets to your next gig and ask them to take some live photos for you – it's nice to have some live shots in your portfolio, capturing the energy of your show.

**Having good quality, high-resolution (hi-res) press shots** before you start reaching out to publications is important because most publications need images to run alongside coverage. In the worst case scenario, not having quality images could lead to coverage falling through, particularly in more visually-led publications.

This varies across all media outlets. An arty, grainy image might look good on screen and okay in a glossy magazine but it probably won't print well on newsprint. While your aesthetic is crucial, you need to think about the bigger picture (pardon the pun).

**Offer multiple options for a designer**, production manager or photo editor to choose from, in a variety of orientations and compositions. Something that might look great as part of a big print feature might crop terribly for a thumbnail or header image on a website. Having a choice of images gives you the opportunity to offer exclusivity on an image to a publication which can be a nice touch.

**Name your image files!** I cannot stress how important this is: 'Artist Name credit Photographers Name' is the absolute dream. At The Skinny, we always credit all photographers in print and online. Without a credit we can't run an image, which could lead to a feature being pulled, especially if you don't send us the information in time.

# Streamable Music

Make it easy for a journalist to listen to your music. Most streaming sites give you the ability to upload music as 'unlisted' – make use of this. If someone has to sign up to a site to gain access, or download an album to be able to listen to it, that can be a massive turn-off and lead to your music being overlooked. It is always a good idea to have a download link handy as journalists might want to listen for review on the go but a streamable link in the first instance is best practice.



## **No attachments!**

The last thing you want to do is go to all of the aforementioned effort only to have your email immediately binned. With that in mind, DO NOT attach a 10MB MP3 of that single you spent so long working on. DO NOT attach a 15MB JPEG of that beautiful image you went to all that trouble to make. If journalists need the high-quality stuff, they'll ask for it, but crashing someone's email or tipping it over its storage limit with your massive email attachments is a no-no.



Instead, sign up to a free file hosting website like Dropbox or use a site like WeTransfer. You can put everything in one place (including those big files) – press release, multiple hi-res images, music – and it can be accessed via one link with no attachments. Ah, the dream.

**There is no magic formula for gaining press attention, especially as music is subjective. While you might do everything in this guide right, don't be disheartened if you don't get those reply emails. Different publications will be looking for different things, and the music industry is oversaturated – it's impossible for everything to be covered by everyone.**

**Believe in your music, keep plugging away and if it's meant to be, it will happen for you.**





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## Tallah Brash, Music Editor at The Skinny.

The Skinny offer informed, entertaining coverage of all things cultural, constantly seeking out new developments before the crowds catch on.

All The Skinny platforms are trusted sources of independent cultural journalism, provided by a passionate community of writers, photographers, illustrators and artists.

The Skinny's vision is to encourage all our readers, in print and digitally, to participate in the scenes around them – our audience always wants to discover.

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