

Let the Past Be the Past: A Study of Independent Record Labels in Today's Hardcore Scene

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Introduction

From adolescence to adulthood I have always felt attracted to live music. My introduction into the hardcore punk scene as a teenager brought me closer than ever before to my favorite artists. There is an overwhelming feeling of involvement and intimacy in this scene, more than any other. Not only can you see your favorite bands at a low cost but you can also meet them, talk to them, buy merchandise from them, and even become part of the performance as hardcore music is heavily dependent on crowd participation. The purpose of an independent record label in the hardcore scene is to help create a platform for these artists to progress. Bands in the hardcore scene look to indie labels as a way to push their music beyond their already established fanbase. These labels do not all operate on the same scale, however, as a vast new market has manifested out of the popularization of online vendors and music streaming services. Being in a hardcore band myself, I have seen first-hand the emergence of many up-and-coming labels and have been able to work with several as well. The scale of indie labels varies from the smallest sized “bedroom” operations to higher volume businesses that have teams of employees working with international acts. Clearly some labels have found more success than others, but perhaps some labels prefer to work on a smaller scale so as to not become overwhelmed. This new breed of record labels begs numerous questions about the manner in which they function. What exactly are the business practices that are involved in the day to day operations of an independent record label in today’s hardcore scene? How do these labels stay above water in an ever-changing music industry, and how do they keep the traditional listening methods relevant while evolving to keep up with the current market? What differentiates a smaller record label from a larger one, and how does scale change the business practices? I intend to answer these questions through research and analysis of successful indie labels and in-field interviews with label owners.

Hardcore Music Today

Unlike most subgenres of guitar-based music, hardcore music has seen an upward curve in popularity since its inception in the early eighties. This is partially due to the cultural aura that surrounds hardcore music and its captivating style that is expressed in club-like venues such as CBGB's. Fans also engage themselves in the music through lifelong acts of sobriety and refusal of animal consumption. "Straight Edge" is a drug-free oath that is symbolized through codes such as X's. Vegetarianism and veganism are also prominent ideologies to follow in the hardcore scene due in part to bands such as Youth of Today and Earth Crisis. In recent years there has been a notable shift in the attitude towards media attention in hardcore. In the 2000's, straight edge kids and hardcore fans were particularly resistant to the commercialization of hardcore music; "they question the convictions and authenticity of highly commercial bands that claim hardcore or sXe roots" (Haenfler 171). Today, hardcore music is worldwide phenomenon receiving coverage by countless internet publications. Outlandish and extreme things tend to spread fast on the internet, and footage of hardcore shows is no exception. The violent dancing and erratic crowd participation is sure to catch the eyes of the media, and nobody captures this better than Sunny of Hate5Six. Hate5Six is a YouTube channel that releases live hardcore video content. The channel has been active since 2008 and as of May, 2020 it has generated over ninety-five thousand subscribers and almost



Hate5six.com. "Close to 10,000 people packed in for Have Heart", *Facebook*, 6 July. 2019.
<https://www.facebook.com/hate5six/photos/a.10155402766692997/10156351954177997/?type=3&theater>

twenty-five million total views (YouTube). Pre-internet content of this nature took the form of VHS tapes or would rarely be seen on television, and even with the creation of YouTube there was never a real platform for live hardcore footage on the site before Hate5Six. Sunny, the founder and operator of the Hate5Six channel, has created a hub where hardcore fans can network with each other through concert footage while also exposing the genre to newcomers. He does this through high-quality production and his unique filming style which makes his content distinct from any potential competitors. The fans have no qualms with Hate5Six's success either because they now have access to exceptional footage of their favorite bands. Sunny has lifted the veil that kept the hardcore scene shrouded in mystery for so many years, paving the way for a new generation of bands which warrants a new demand for labels as well.

Independent Record Labels

The record label industry is a vast market with millions of dollars invested into wildly popular artists, but the underground equivalent presents itself as a much more intimate approach to an old formula. Independent record labels, as we know them today, are a means to promote artists and release music without white collar intervention. This isn't the whole story, however, as record labels are as old as records themselves. Author Peter Mills conducts case studies and discusses the history of independent labels in his book *Media and Popular Music*. Much like a training camp for a football team, indie labels in the 1960's were viewed as "little more than stables for talent which the 'major' record companies could come and cherry pick from" (Mills 110). The growth of the independent record label industry was a byproduct of unconventional music becoming more popular in mainstream audiences. As Mills describes; "the commercial returns on the success of such acts enabled their parent labels to grow and foster other talent"

(Mills 112). It was at this point in the 1980's, thanks to television and more radio airplay for niche artists, that artists began to grow commercially on their own and bring their labels along with them. This growth is what allowed indie labels to exist without the prying eyes or inevitable turning over of artists to major labels. The phrase "independent record label" seems to be an oxymoron when considering what each term means. The term "record label" implies a mass production scale multi-million-dollar company, while "independent" refers to the opposite of such being nonadjacent to a capitalist agenda while working within your own limitations. In 1995, Stephen Lee conducted a study of Chicago based label Wax Trax Records which was published in *Popular Music, Vol. 14, No. 1* by Cambridge University Press. Lee examines the distinctions between "indie" and "major" labels and finds why the indie labels may have a leg up. Independent record labels rely on unconventional business practices to promote music that is considered to be niche, Lee elaborates by stating "The development of a wide range of musical genres and styles - are often attributed to the small companies that operated outside of the control of the larger 'major' labels" (Lee 13). These indie label's business practices and promotion tactics are on a smaller scale than those of the majors. "They are therefore more likely to pick up on emerging musical trends and bring them to market quickly." (Lee 13). The indie labels are able to reach their consumer base at a faster rate than the majors which helps when the development of a new musical trend is emerging, and in recent years the hardcore music scene has been attracting the attention of indie and major labels alike.

Going to a hardcore show is wildly immersive, a display of pure aggression and energy, which is why fans can't stop coming back for more. At any given hardcore show, you can see almost every physical listening medium imaginable on the merch table. From cassette tapes, vinyl records, CD's, and MP3 download codes, bands in the hardcore scene want their listeners

to be able to enjoy their music on multiple platforms. Why is it that fans of this music are listening to their favorite artists through so many mediums? Tradition is a key value in the hardcore scene, so it is crucial for bands and fans alike to mirror their hardcore ancestors and the ways they consumed this music. Hardcore code and gatekeeping are elaborated by author Susan Willis in her 1993 article titled *Hardcore: Subculture American Style*. As Willis states, hardcore music culture is “articulated through CD and cassette consumption, college radio air play, and alternative market magazines” (Willis 367). Much of this is accurate to this day, but how has the internet changed the way hardcore music is consumed if at all? In the digital age, the hardcore scene has updated their listening methods with streaming and downloads while keeping tradition alive. Physical music has become more about authenticity or collectability than practicality. Hardcore bands have kept producing physical music because there is a demand for it. Just like selling tee shirts and stickers, physical music is essential to a hardcore band’s growth. Producing physical music such as vinyl records and CD’s can prove to be costly, however, and these costs may not be in an up-and-coming band’s budget. This is why the Do It Yourself movement has had such an impact on the hardcore scene.

D.I.Y.

Fan involvement in the hardcore scene goes far beyond moshing or playing in a band. The term Do It Yourself or D.I.Y. has its roots in the early punk rock scene, as author Teal Triggs discusses in her 2006 article titled *Scissors and Glue*. Triggs is the author of *Fanzines: The DIY Revolution* and has extensive knowledge of D.I.Y. practices in the 1970’s punk scene. She states that punk music was “seen as an alternative to the mainstream music industry and provided something new and liberating through its independent and 'do-it-yourself approach”

(Triggs 70). This is referring to the way bands would promote their art and book their concerts without corporate influence. Triggs explores the concept of the “fanzine”, which was a way for fans to communicate punk-related news and information through home-made magazines. As Triggs elaborates, the contents of a fanzine can consist of “gig schedules, interviews with bands and reviews of new albums alongside features on current political events and personal rants” (Triggs 70). Fanzines are still utilized to this day at hardcore shows, and often distributed by independent record labels. Bands in today’s hardcore scene, for the most part, follow the same D.I.Y. code that the early punk bands would by producing their own merchandise,



Streets of Hate NY. “Issues 1-3 available now!”, *Instagram*, 27 April. 2017.

<https://www.instagram.com/p/BTaXOTGli5G/>

recording their own music and self-releasing it. This has all become more accessible, however, because of the rise of the internet. Self-releasing music is simpler than ever now because of online services such as Bandcamp which allows an artist to upload their music to the internet for free, and Distrokid which charges a flat fee to publish an artist’s music on streaming services such as Spotify and iTunes. When speaking of wearable merchandise, it is easy enough to go to a t-shirt print shop and make some clothes to sell at shows or online. Cutting out these middlemen will help generate more profit for the artist as the cost to produce merchandise will be much lower. What isn’t easy is screen-printing your own t-shirts and pressing your own vinyl records or printing hundreds of j-cards for tape inserts. If an artist decides they do not want to interact with third party companies in order to produce merchandise they may find difficulty doing it themselves if they have no prior experience. The job of an independent record label in that hardcore scene is to provide these services and more for an artist, while creating exposure for

both parties as well. The internet has helped to make promoting an artist much more accessible as well with the creation of online marketing tools and social media. This in turn created a highly saturated market where seemingly anyone can start their own promotion-based label online. With this in mind, what can record labels do to set themselves apart from the competition in this field? It is important to recognize how record labels become distinct, and that is with their artists.

The bands that a record label collaborates with is what defines them, and recognizing trends is another valuable tool that record labels need to utilize in order to succeed. Do label owners have a natural intuition for knowing when a band will do well, or do they need in-field experience in order to make these judgements? Ray Cappo was a musician involved in numerous classic New York hardcore and straight edge bands including Youth of Today, Shelter, Violent Children and Better Than a Thousand. When Ray decided he wanted to start his own record label in 1987 along with his partner Jordan Cooper, he knew what bands were going to help get his label off the ground because he had been a prominent figure in the scene for such a long time already. The label is still active today and is called

Revelation Records. Ray was inspired by the D.I.Y. ethics of the early punk scene and began to create compilation records, or “samplers”, as a way to expose his consumer base to multiple artists at one time. An article published by The Hundreds speaks about the history of Revelation Records and states that “A label “sampler,” especially for a punk label, is key—not only because it’s a lower production cost and functioned as a commercial for the entire catalog, but it’s an affordable entry point for a fan” (The Hundreds). Compilation records are likely the



Revelation Records. “Various - Cassette Sampler.” *Discogs*, 1 Jan. 1995. www.discogs.com/Various-Cassette-Sampler/release/9739708.

best way to expose your business to multiple artist audiences with only one release, while also exposing your consumer base to other artists in your catalogue that they may not know of yet.

Quote Unquote Records was founded by musician Jeff Rosenstock in 2006. Rosenstock was the prominent songwriter for popular punk band Bomb the Music Industry (BTMI abbreviated) until their disbandment in 2014. BTMI was renowned for their D.I.Y. approach to merchandise and self-promotion, such as spray-painting tee shirts outside of their shows and refusing to perform at an event that charges more than \$10 per ticket. Rosenstock's D.I.Y. mentality is what helped spark the idea for his record label. On Quote Unquote's website they claim to be the "first ever donation-based record label" (Quote Unquote). Their approach was not to make money off of record or CD sales. Instead, Quote Unquote's entire artist catalogue is available to download for free, meaning any album by any participating artist on the label is free to download. In Rosenstock's words, "CD sales ain't doin' so hot. That's because people just download it anyway" (Quote Unquote). You can donate to the label on their website, which is how they cover operating costs. It works because the label consists of a wide variety of artists from all corners, making the website into a hub where listeners can download music from bands they currently enjoy and discover their new favorite bands all in one place. This began in a time before streaming services or music uploading sites like Bandcamp so it was very much ahead of the curve especially for a record label, and the formula worked as the website is still running with their most recent release in November of 2019. Rosenstock proved that a small to moderate sized record label can operate solely based on individual contributions and free music downloads which opened the door for other record labels to follow suit. Now it is commonplace to see record labels put music up online to download for free. Another common label practice now is to insert a free album download code into a vinyl record sleeve or CD case.

Competition in the Hardcore Label Market

Many popular indie record labels are at the forefront of today's hardcore scene such as Pure Noise Records, which is a California based label consisting of mainly hardcore, punk, metalcore and emo bands. They are responsible for bringing some of the world's current most popular hardcore and punk bands into the mainstream media's eye, such as The Story So Far and Knocked Loose. In an interview with Pure Noise Records owner Jake Round, he echoes the claim that the key to label success is in the artists you choose to work with by stating; "a good record makes its own buzz" (Round). Another big player in the current hardcore record label game is Deathwish Inc. whose founder Jacob Bannon is the singer of the popular hardcore band Converge. Bannon describes his company as a "different model and mindset" as opposed to the "aging dinosaur for how things used to work" (Boston Globe). The "aging dinosaur" Bannon refers to is the music downloading sites of that time such as Napster. Deathwish's distribution-forward mindset has helped dozens of bands reach a national listening audience. Even the major labels have been setting their eye on the hardcore scene, such as Roadrunner Records who has worked with mega-acts such as Korn, Slipknot, and Nickelback. In recent years, Roadrunner has been releasing music by newer hardcore bands such as Turnstile and Code Orange as they gain traction during the incline of hardcore music popularity.

The size and volume of a record label determines how one might produce these goods and services. A label might have their own set of screen-printing machines that they use to make merchandise, while bigger jobs may need to be outsourced to a larger operation. The same goes for making tapes, records, CD's etc. Promotion of an artist is another role for a record label. In the digital age artist promotion has become much simpler, yet far more complex at the same

time. Facebook's promotion platform has made it so that any artist can put their work front and center on anybody's feed. Meanwhile, this simplicity has saturated the ad space and made it difficult to stand out amongst a sea of promotions. Furthermore, it is difficult to promote hardcore music to someone who has never heard it or has a distaste for it.

It is easy to imagine why there has been a surge in smaller size record labels, but not many are able to rise to the challenge of increasing their scale in order to work at a higher volume. Typically, a small independent record label in the hardcore scene will produce clothing and physical copies of music in order to promote music that is created by their friends. Larger record labels function on a bigger scale, working with international artists and mass producing their products. Booking concerts and tours may also be important for the promotion of a label's artists. So how does one go about starting a business venture like this and how do they decide what scale they want to work on? Most people who decide to work in this field have prior knowledge or experience, whether this be in the form of an internship or a job working for a label. One must have enhanced knowledge of the hardcore scene, current trends and popular artists in order to succeed. One should have connections to artists and managers in order to reach out about collaborations, goods and services that can be provided. Most record labels in the hardcore scene start at the same baseline volume and expand their operation depending on their initial success. In order to paint a clear picture of what it takes to start a successful record label in the modern hardcore scene, in-field research is required. My research will help determine how small-scale, up-and-coming independent record labels operate.

Methods and Research Goals

Three small scale independent hardcore record labels were interviewed to determine what business practices make them successful or unsuccessful. The interviews will be based in question and answer format and conducted through email. By utilizing open ended questioning and qualitative interviewing methods, I am hoping to learn more about record label business practices and what it takes to operate at various levels. Some questions I want to answer are: If they have been successful, how may that success be replicated or improved upon? How do the business practices of the small-scale record labels compare to those of their higher volume competitors? How does one stay “ahead of the curve” in terms of popular bands in their area and beyond? What are some difficulties that are faced when operating one of these companies, and what tools are utilized to help the business succeed?

Stephen Kielb is the owner of “Street Fight Records” a small Long Island based label working primarily with local bands, distributing cassette tapes, CD’s and vinyl records. Stephen’s input will be important while discussing the relevance of small, D.I.Y. style tape labels. Thomas Robinson is the owner of “Suplex Records”, a relatively new label based out of Connecticut working with artists from all over the country. Suplex distributes tapes, clothing, records, and CD’s. It will be interesting to observe how an upcoming small label can operate on such a wide geographic scale. Tommy also works at a screen print and embroidery shop, which may be a great advantage and increase his label’s likelihood of generating profit. John Scanlon is the co-owner of Reconsider Records, a Long Island based label who has a local focus and occasionally will work with artists from other regions. John also works with East Coast Collective which is a



Street Fight Records. “Soul Provider - Demo”, *limitedrun.com*.
<https://streetfightrecords.limitedrun.com/products/660681-soul-provider-demo>

concert booking and promotion company. This experience may help John when choosing artists to promote through his record label.

The interview questions included the following:

1. When were you introduced to hardcore/punk music?
2. What are some record labels you take an interest in and are inspired by?
3. What made you decide to start your own record label, did you have any models to follow? How long have you been in business? Do you work alone or with others?
4. How many bands have you worked with? Are they all similar in style? If they are distinct, how so?
5. What services do you provide for these artists? Do you have a focus on merchandise and distribution, or do you promote artists in other ways?
6. Do you find any difficulty breaking even? Do you keep a budget, and if so are you at a surplus or deficit?
7. What do you find most difficult about operating your business? What makes it easier?
8. What are your plans for the future? Collaborators? How big do you want to go?

Findings

All three participants had been introduced to hardcore at a young age. Stephen, owner of Street Fight Records, had first heard hardcore music in the soundtrack for the video game Grand Theft Auto IV. John, co-owner of Reconsider Records, stated that one of his childhood friends had an older brother that was attending hardcore shows at the time. Tommy, owner of Suplex

Records, was shown hardcore music by a peer in his art class in high school. This is a clear indication that an understanding of the hardcore scene is likely necessary if one decides to start an independent hardcore record label. Although an appreciation for the music should be apparent, knowledge of your successors and potential competitors is also essential. Both John and Stephen cited the popular hardcore labels Revelation Records and Lockin' Out Records as inspiration for their own companies. Tommy's business models reach outside of hardcore, however, as he lists several hip-hop labels as inspiration such as Griselda Records and Hypnotize Mindz. Hip-hop music and hardcore music have a history of sharing the same space stylistically. Some of the same codes can be observed in both scenes, for example, an emphasis on wordplay in the music. It is interesting to see hip-hop's influence on the hardcore record label, but Tommy does go on to cite other hardcore labels as inspiration for his own business, such as Edgewood Records and Homie Shit Mag which are much smaller in size compared to Revelation and Lockin' Out.

John's label, Reconsider Records, almost exclusively distributes physical music such as CD's, tapes, and vinyl records. The label has made some tee shirts to promote their artists but this is rare for them. Reconsider has released music from California band Dead Heat, but mostly works with bands from the Long Island area such as Jukai,

Sanction, Forced out, and John's own band The Fight.

Stephen's label Street Fight Records, also has an emphasis on promoting Long Island artists such as Poor Choice, Jab, Draw the Line and Blame God. Street Fight also focuses on physical music releases but also sells tee shirts with the Street Fight branding in order to promote the business. Tommy's business,



Street Fight Records. "T-Shirt", *limitedrun.com*.

<https://streetfightrecords.limitedrun.com/categories/t-shirt>

Suplex Records, also distributes physical music in the form of cassette tapes but their reach in terms of artist location and diversity is far wider than the other two labels. Suplex's artist roster features artists from Connecticut, Long Island, New Jersey, Massachusetts, Kentucky, Indiana, and Nevada. Suplex makes clothing for their artists, such as shirts, jackets and hoodies, and this clothing will usually feature the Suplex label branding on it. Suplex also sells their own branded merchandise to promote their own business such as embroidered hats. John expressed that breaking even wasn't much of a challenge for his company in the beginning which can likely be attributed to the fact that his business partner Albin worked in a record pressing shop, which substantially reduced the production cost of vinyl records. Since vinyl records are the focus of John's business and he does not need to go through a middleman to get them made, his expenses were minimal. Stephen found difficulty breaking even because he needs to rely on third-party companies to produce his company's merchandise, including everything from CD's, tapes, records and shirts. Tommy's business has somewhat of an advantage because he works for a screen print and embroidery shop, which means Tommy doesn't have to go through a third-party shop in order to produce tee-shirts, hoodies, jackets, hats, etc. In spite of this, Tommy still expresses difficulty breaking even with his business possible because of the scale he operates on. Suplex's reach goes far beyond his hometown which makes the demand for his products much higher and shipping costs are a sizable expense for him.

The common motif among each of the label owners is that they do what they do because they enjoy doing it. John makes it clear that running his label is a hobby, and that most labels in hardcore "aren't serious" (Scanlon). Stephen states that running his business would be much easier to manage if he had a bigger team of employees or collaborators. On the other hand, Tommy prefers to work on his own, but expresses that he finds difficulty pressing cassette tapes

on his own especially for large orders because the machine he uses to press tapes is not meant for large batch production. When each participant was asked about the future of their business and how big they want their label to become, John replied by explaining that his label will only be as successful as the artists it promotes since he almost exclusively releases music that his friends create. Stephen expresses that he wants to be able to push the artists he promotes further than their own fanbases and expand his business into the territory of vinyl production. Tommy understands that he is taking up a great responsibility by promoting bands from so many different regions of the country and that he needs to “take it slow” to be able to keep up with the demand (Tommy).

Successful Business Practices

To summarize the findings of each of these interviews, every participant has a similar goal: supporting their friends and the music they make. Each business has distinct operations and scales that they tend to work on. Essentially, there are three different business practices that can be observed while discussing independent record labels. Those practices are distribution, promotion, and collaboration. In short, distribution describes the sales of artist related goods and merchandise. Promotion describes the way a label spreads the word about an artist and their music. Collaboration is the work done with other businesses in an effort to expand their consumer base. It is clear that Tommy’s label is the most ambitious of the group because he chooses to work with many artists at once, all being from different parts of the country. John’s business is seemingly the most professional as he tends to work with more popular artists and collaborates with other labels as well. Stephen’s label has the most prominent D.I.Y. approach because he works entirely alone and on a smaller scale as compared to the other two. All three

labels distribute, promote, and collaborate in different ways. The significance of these business practices should be discussed in order to determine what makes each label distinct.

Distribution is a vital part of any successful independent record label. In the hardcore scene especially, there is a profound appreciation for physical music and band merchandise. Much of the hardcore merch that is distributed by labels is done so online. Services such as Big Cartel and Bandcamp make it simple to set up a virtual vendor. All three of the participants have set up online shops for their labels, John and Tommy use Big Cartel and Stephen uses another service called Limited Run. In person sales are another way that labels tend to distribute their products, especially at festivals and bigger concert events. Most hardcore shows take place in a room that reaches its maximum capacity at about one hundred to two-hundred attendees. This intimate setting is what makes hardcore concerts unique, but the larger shows are where labels typically set up vendors because there is more space to do so. In-person vendors give a label the opportunity to build a consumer base from the ground up on a personal level, as opposed to strictly online sales. Many labels, such as Tommy's Suplex and Stephen's Street Fight, give merchandise to their artists to sell as well as keeping it for themselves. The label pays for the production cost of an artist's merchandise and might brand it with the label's logo or watermark. This has several benefits, one being the strengthening of your relationship with the artist. The label will then sell as many pieces as they need to in order to make the money back and will give the rest to the artist. The artist then makes 100% profit on each piece sold, the label gets



Suplex Records. Facebook, 21 Oct. 2019. <https://www.facebook.com/suplexrecords203/photos/a.160800821178477/483539545571268/?type=3&theater>

exposure from the merch sold as well, and the artist becomes partially dependent on the label to produce new merchandise.

Promotion of music artists has become almost effortless in the internet age, but those who take extra steps are the ones who prove successful. The majority of artist promotion and marketing from hardcore labels takes place on social media. This is an easy and effective way to convey information about artist releases and merchandise to large numbers of people. All of the participants utilize social media outlets such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram to promote their business. A label's promotion tactics beyond the computer screen are typically what makes them distinct. In some cases, a label will book a concert to showcase their artists. Tommy did this in March when he booked a Suplex Records showcase featuring artists that he works with from the northeast. The show took place in Connecticut, 6 bands played including his own. Not only did the promotion of this event generate exposure for his artists, but it also gave his label a platform to promote itself by selling Suplex-produced merchandise. The event drew about one hundred attendees. Another successful promotion tool that Tommy utilizes is compilation material. He released a compilation tape called the *Suplex Records Mixtape* that featured the music of nine different artists from all over the country. This strategy allows him to promote multiple artists at once which creates the most amount of business exposure with a minimal production cost.

A label has to collaborate with many other entities in order to gain higher ground in the field. Obviously, there should be a level of collaboration between the artist and the label such as the branding of merchandise seen previously. Collaborating with another label may lead to the expansion of one's consumer base. In order to determine which labels would be interested in a partnership, one will require in field experience and knowledge of their competitors. This means

years of experience attending hardcore shows. John has the most seniority in the hardcore scene out of the three interview participants, which gives him the upper hand in terms of in-field knowledge. The underground nature of the hardcore scene forces one to make connections in order to expand their consumer base, which is also the purpose of in-person distribution as mentioned earlier. John's experience in the hardcore scene has helped him find business partners and collaborators. Recently John's label, Reconsider Records, teamed up with another northeast hardcore label called Daze to collaborate on a tee-shirt to promote both businesses. Reconsider also released a newsletter in April of this year that features a piece by a Hudson Valley label called Streets of Hate about their favorite videos of hardcore shows that you can find on the internet. Collaborating with other labels not only creates exposure for everyone involved, but it may also potentially mean future success for those involved as well. If one label "makes it big" it may have a trickle-down effect on past collaborators.



Reconsider Records. "Our shirt with DAZE", *Instagram*, 4 May. 2020. https://www.instagram.com/p/B_xg_PoJmUc/

Conclusion

Today, the operation of an independent record label is much different than it was fifty years ago. Indie labels are no longer a breeding ground for artists who aspire to move on to the major counterparts. Rather, the indie label provides a space to grow and develop a symbiotic relationship with the artist. There is now a vast market for the independent label, filled with competition. In the internet age, many of the limitations that kept older labels from being able to

reach a wider audience are no longer problematic. The accessibility of distribution sites and marketing tools has made it easier than ever to start a small-scale label. In today's hardcore scene, labels aren't just utilizing computers to jumpstart their businesses. They are keeping the old torches burning by setting up in-person vendors and pop-ups, selling vinyl records and cassette tapes, and packaging orders in their bedrooms instead of a warehouse. They are collaborating with musicians, artists, and other labels to create fanzines and newsletters. They are booking shows to promote their artists which in turn keeps their local scene alive. The D.I.Y. mindset that carried weight in the eighties still does to this day as label owners are printing their own shirts, pressing their tapes, and publishing their artist's music without the influence of corporations. Though many label owners claim that they do not make money with their business, they also echo the sentiment that they do not care. They find the label business attractive because there is a larger feeling of involvement than just attending shows and listening to the music. The labels who do make money are those who reduce production costs by cutting out middlemen such as screen printers and record pressers. The development of an intimacy between label, artist, and consumer is what determines success on this scale. This, in conjunction with thorough social media marketing and the use of online vendors, is the formula for success in the hardcore record label field. Positive artist relations, customer satisfaction, and a personal connection to the product is what makes a label greater than the sum of its parts.

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