

Q&A: Promoting New Releases To Jazz Radio



Radio has been an integral delivery and discovery system for jazz for much of its history and, despite a slew of other options technology has provided in the meantime, that's still the case today.

How can independent artists access these programmers and radio stations still out there tirelessly supporting the music? What are they looking for? Do they prefer physical or digital promos? How much does it cost to hire an experienced radio promoter?

For the answers to these questions, and many others, we interviewed 35-year industry veteran Mitchell Feldman. His firm, [Mitchell Feldman Associates \(MFA\)](#), specializes in promoting new releases to jazz radio, which it has done for clients ranging from up-and-coming independent artists to world-renowned labels such as ECM Records and music ranging from mainstream to fusion to world jazz to avant-garde.

Hi Mitchell, thanks for taking the time to answer our questions about your work. Let's start with what should be on a musician's list of realistic expectations when hiring someone to promote his/her music to radio.

The first realistic expectation is that a promoter will actually do (and actually is able to do) what they are being hired to do, namely help a CD get auditioned and eventually played on the radio. I'd encourage an artist to get informed by doing Web research about the pool of potential radio promoters out there, as well as asking other artists for recommendations. Unfortunately, as in any field, experience, competence and results achieved vary widely.

Secondly, understanding that decisions about programming music are based on a variety of factors, but the bottom line is either the music works for a station or program's particular sound or it doesn't. No promoter can guarantee a CD will be added. What promoters can provide is access based on personal relationships as well as a reputation for representing quality artists and music.

Finally, it is definitely unrealistic to expect to recoup (in either CD or download sales) the cost of any promotional campaign and to limit one's definition of both success and results in this way. I make it very clear in my initial conversations with potential clients that a radio campaign must be looked at as a marketing expense, with the goal being to raise an artist's profile and increase awareness of his or her music on a national level.

How should one define a campaign's success? Clearly one is having a CD come in as a top add at [JazzWeek](#) and [CMJ](#), as well as getting—and staying for as many consecutive weeks as possible—on both of those charts. These are realistic expectations, as is being programmed by as large a percentage as possible of the overall number of contacts serviced.

These are also quantifiable and documentable results an artist can use to promote his or her self on their own Web sites, social networking sites, press kits, etc. And, this data can also be used to try to get gigs in markets where a CD received significant airplay and established an identity with the listening public there.

Certain intangible results can also help define success. I've had clients whose radio airplay led to a commission from a filmmaker to compose a soundtrack, being hired to arrange music and produce a CD, and gigs at festivals. Each bolstered their résumés and the fees my clients received were more than they paid for their radio promotion.

What are some basic things musicians should look out for when choosing a radio promoter?

One concern is how many projects a promoter takes on at once. Will that person have time to devote the attention and energy one would hope to receive in return for the investment? Avoid hiring a promoter who will be simultaneously working a release by another artist playing the same instrument.

Having four campaigns in various stages of promotion going at any given time is a manageable number for me and ensures I can track and provide weekly reports to my clients. Also, I will not mail out to radio contacts within four to six weeks of each other two CDs by, say, a pianist or a saxophonist unless they are so stylistically different that they're not going to be competing with each other.

Also, an artist should be conscious of a potential pitfall that can occur when a promoter has a long-term retainer relationship with one or more labels. This might create the regrettable situation where a promotion campaign for a DIY release by a lesser-known artist might end up taking a back seat to a campaign running concurrently for the latest album by a well-established artist.

This is not to imply any promoter makes a conscious decision to emphasize one campaign over another, but it is naïve to think any promoter is going to jeopardize a retainer relationship by not delivering results for a big release on a major label. I've seen it happen too often that a self-produced CD by an emerging artist looking for national exposure gets overshadowed and overlooked because a promoter had other priorities.

In your experience, what kinds of things should a musician or label be thinking about during the recording and production process (design, track order, track length, etc.) if they're planning to actively promote that record to radio?

Tracks lengths are probably the most important consideration, especially if one is looking to get played on a major market NPR affiliate station (e.g. WBGO in NYC, KKJZ in L.A., KCSM in San Francisco, KUVO in Denver, etc.) between 6 a.m. (the start of morning drive time) and 7 or 8 p.m. (the end of evening drive time).

The chances of a song over eight minutes getting played during this period are less than shorter ones. Track length is less of an issue on freeform, college and community stations as well as late-night or overnight shows.

It's also very important that track times be clearly printed on the outside back of a CD, especially for emerging or unknown artists. Failing to do so will definitely delay a CD getting auditioned, let alone programmed, as it will add to the work a music director must do to process it. This is a crucial design element for some of the most important stations around the country.

Another design element to be aware of is the legibility of printed text. Having important information like song titles and other credits in a tiny font or printing red letters on a black background might be aesthetically



Mitchell Feldman

pleasing to an artist, but it can present difficulties when it comes to getting a CD programmed.

Regarding track order, sequencing is an art. One should definitely start a CD with a track that immediately grabs a listener's attention and shows off one's writing and playing skills. Radio programmers receive dozens of CDs a week to audition so first impressions are key.

Putting together a CD is a lot like putting together a set of music on a radio show, the dynamics should be similar to an ocean wave with peaks and valleys and songs should segue in and out of each other in a natural way.

Is there any truth to the rumors that many stations won't play tracks with bass or drum solos?

There is no truth to that at all.

Some programmers might be less tolerant of lesser-known instrumentalists whose desire to showcase their chops might be heard as being self-indulgent, but no jazz radio station is going to avoid playing a new track by Charlie Haden or Jack DeJohnette, for example, that starts out with, or features, a solo.

I wouldn't suggest a bassist or drummer *start* a track with a solo intro, though if they must then certainly not longer than 10-15 seconds.

One encounters resistance to bass or drum solos more on mainstream/NPR affiliate-type stations, particularly in major markets. But, that's also because part of the challenge of broadcasting bass solos is the fact that many people listen to the radio in their cars and the low end of the sound spectrum tends to get buried by ambient noise like traffic.

As with track length concerns, tracks with bass or drum solos are rarely an issue for college and freeform stations and overnight programming.



How do you choose the clients you work with?

My main criterion for working with a client is that the music resonate with me—getting goose bumps when I hear something is usually a good sign—and that there be at least three to four tracks on a CD I'd play on my own radio show.

How far in advance should a potential client be contacting you about their new release?

Answering this assumes an artist has the foresight to actually factor in the cost of marketing a CD into his or her budget, which curiously is not always the case.

I'm often contacted by artists who only have the resources to conduct either a radio promotion campaign or a publicity campaign and have opted to go for radio. Or, artists who have already had publicity done and are just getting around to, or have the funds to pay for, radio promotion.

It seems pointless to me for musicians to have invested time, energy and money to release a CD without also having the resources to promote and market it.

The smart thing to do is coordinate the radio and publicity campaigns to run concurrently so the CD is getting airplay as well as press coverage around the time of its release and in the following few months.

Lead time for radio promotion campaigns is much shorter than in the case of publicity, which requires promos to be sent out two to three months in advance of an album's street date.

One should coordinate a radio promotion campaign to coincide with the release date (traditionally a Tuesday) with copies mailed out to contacts two weeks before then and a radio add date (see below) set for the day (usually a Monday) before the release date.

To do this, I like to have promos on hand no later than a month before the release date. This means initial contact should ideally take place at least six weeks before a CD's release date, although I've conducted promotions for artists who've contacted four weeks before a release date and also after a CD has been out for months.

This allows us the time to discuss goals and objectives, to listen and determine whether I can be of service to an artist, and to come to an agreement about the scope of the promotion and financial terms.

One final note, the worst thing an artist can do is contact a radio promoter after already sending copies out to broadcasters. Definitely hold off until making a final decision about whether or not to retain a promoter.

While I sympathize with an artist's excitement about getting his or her music out into the world, this should be planned and orchestrated and not the result of urgent impulses. It's best to have all radio contacts receive a CD at the same time and not send out copies to some broadcasters before others.

Speaking of timing, what is an add date and why is it important?

A CD's add date is the Monday of the week you want programmers to start playing an album/add it to a station's rotation. Usually this is the day before a CD's street or release date (traditionally a Tuesday), although it can also be the Monday of the week before or the Monday of the week after a CD's release date.

Sometimes CDs are promoted to radio that have officially been out for months (I wouldn't suggest beyond four to six months) because an artist either did not factor in a radio promotion campaign in his or her marketing plan or did not have the resources to pay for a radio promotion campaign at the time the CD was released. My advice to artists is not to release a CD until one has the funds to pay for basic marketing such as publicity and radio promotion campaigns.



How important is establishing personal relationships with radio programmers to your job and how do you go about creating trust with them via the records you choose to send each person?

I have longstanding professional relationships with media contacts, some of whom I consider friends and others I've never met in person, but regardless of how close one is with a radio programmer (or editor or writer) nobody is doing anyone any favors.

Although I definitely have access to decision/taste makers, whether he or she programs a CD I'm promoting is, as it should be, solely based on the quality of the music.

That said, having been a music journalist as well as a DJ, I know what it's like to be on the receiving end of an editorial pitch or a radio tracking call or e-mail and the hard sell is definitely not my style. Writers and radio programmers I work with respect this and understand I'm very passionate about my work, tenacious in trying to get my clients' music played or written about and very selective about the projects I take on.

It's very gratifying to be told by someone like Nat Hentoff that I have "one of the best lists out there" and that when he receives a CD from me he knows it's going to be by an artist he might never previously have heard of but should be aware of.

A case in point being saxophonist Hailey Niswanger's self-produced/released debut CD *Confeddie*, that I publicized and promoted in 2009 when she was a 19-year-old sophomore at Berklee. It prompted Mr. Hentoff to call me on a Saturday afternoon to thank me, and he eventually profiled Hailey in *The Wall Street Journal* and included her in the chapter on emerging artists carrying the modern jazz tradition forward in his latest book.

Please walk us through the process of promoting a client's new release and the various steps you engage in both with the client and your radio contacts.

Once I've been retained, and the promo mailing date, radio add date and payment terms have been set, I put together the panel of contacts and ask the client to send me the materials I need to prepare the one sheet. These include hi-res, 300 dpi JPG files of the cover art and label logo, as well as a text file of featuring song titles and times, composer and musician credits and the URL of the artist's website.

I then post the CD (artist and label name, title and release date) among upcoming add dates on the JazzWeek Web site and also submit this information to CMJ so it is in the database for add and airplay reports.

A few weeks before the mailing, I post the album's cover art and one sheet on my Facebook business page and start mentioning the CD as an upcoming project in my tracking calls and individual tracking e-mails to radio contacts.

The week the CD is mailed, I include it in my weekly e-mail blast to hundreds of radio contacts. Between the mailing week and add week, I alert people in my calls and e-mails to expect it any day and start ascertaining if people have received it.

My weekly blast includes a call to action to start the process of auditioning and reviewing the CD. During a CD's add week, I'm soliciting adds both in my tracking calls and e-mails and in my blast. Soon after, I start including results for the CD and continue to solicit adds and airplay in the following weeks.

Clients receive a full tracking report every week starting with results through the end of a CD's add week (3 weeks into the campaign), culminating with a final wrap-up report at the end of the promotion. As soon as I get them, I forward to clients any and all add reports and playlists I receive or find online and keep a running list of stations and program hosts who've added the CD that I update daily and include in my weekly reports.

As far as client contact is concerned, some clients are very hands on and get in touch regularly and others I hardly, if ever, hear from. I'm available during business hours (Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m., and later or on weekends if something urgent needs to be addressed) whenever a client wants to get in touch.

My preference is to conduct conversations in real time on the phone or using SKYPE than in a series of e-mails.



Do you send the promos out yourself or do your clients handle their own mailings?

I absolutely prefer to send out the promos myself since my list of contacts is based on proprietary information, and I've invested a lot of time, energy and research to build my database and keep it current.

Sometimes I agree to let a client do the mailing using my return address labels and contact labels I provide, in which case I always include my address as a control to have an idea when contacts are receiving the CD.

I've learned the hard way that providing labels to someone else risks them being copied and re-used for another mailing or as the basis to create his or her own database, so when a client is doing the mailing I make it clear that the labels are being provided for one use only to mail the CD I've been retained to promote.

The materials (padded mailers, one sheet, mailing labels, etc.) and first class postage cost the same whether I'm paying for them or the client is. If I do the mailing, I add a modest surcharge per package for my labor.

Another reason I prefer to do the mailing is that there's a definite way to stuff an envelope that might seem to some a bit obsessive-compulsive but represents an attention to detail that makes sense. If one is going to go to the time and expense of designing and printing promo materials, it's important to do everything possible so the recipient will see them.

I basically place each CD inside the folded printed material (like the filling in a taco shell) so hopefully the info sheet won't remain in the envelope and be ignored or thrown away. I also make sure the printed side of a one-sided piece is visible, as opposed to the blank side. This might seem like a small detail, but once again if one's going to spend the money and invest the time to develop print material, what good does it do if the first thing a person sees opening a package is a white sheet of paper?

How do you charge your clients for your time and how does the rate structure generally work in the world of radio promotion?

Generally, radio promoters charge a flat rate for a campaign. The campaign's length (number of weeks) and scope (number of contacts serviced), as well as the amount of tracking required, can be variables that alter that fee.

Depending on the lead-time involved, a deposit might be required to lock a campaign into a promotion schedule. In my case, I prefer not to have similar CDs (i.e. two piano trios) going out to radio within four to six weeks of each other and competing for coveted programming slots.

I usually don't discuss specific fees until I've heard a potential client's CD and have some idea if a.) the music resonates with me and has three or four tracks I'd play on my own radio program, b.) it's a project that could benefit from my contacts and expertise, and c.) the music would resonate with the contacts in my database and be likely to be programmed.

Ideally, an artist should allocate at least \$8000—or even better \$10,000—for marketing a CD. The lower amount would be the ballpark figure to retain a dedicated A-list radio promoter and a dedicated A-List publicist. You get what you pay for and saving money by hiring a less qualified person usually turns into a

penny-wise, pound-foolish situation.

This amount would cover each conducting three-month campaigns and the preparation and printing of texts (a one sheet for radio, a press release, a bio for the press, etc.) as well as packaging, postage and other materials for mailings to hundreds of media contacts. The higher figure would enable one to do all of the above plus buy some print advertising somewhere.

How important is securing interviews to what you do? Are stations still doing phoners or do musicians need to be out on the road to get interviews today?

This varies from station to station. While interviews provide important exposure for artists, the primary results I aim to achieve for my clients are generating adds, airplay and charting.

Some stations and program hosts won't do phoners and insist a musician visit the studio, while others have no problem conducting interviews over the phone. Some stations will only interview an artist appearing in their market, while others will interview an artist based on the fact that he or she has released a new CD that is in rotation.

Arranging interviews for my clients is part of MFA's services, however, with the exception of artists on ECM, Origin and Anzic Records, few are actually touring during the term of the campaign. So, my setting up interviews often depends on a CD being programmed by the station or host and opportunities that don't require an artist to be performing locally.

KSJS in San Jose, for example, is one great outlet for these kinds of interviews.



In your experience, what is most important to a radio programmer/music director who is deciding which releases to add to a show/station's rotation?

The most important factor is that a CD should have at least three or four tracks that fit into a particular station's/program's sound. Having been doing this for a number of years, I'm aware of what kind of music resonates with individual program hosts and what kind of music a particular program/ music director adds to a station's current rotation.

When I'm choosing radio contacts to receive a particular CD, I make my selections based on the music and eliminate any stations that would clearly never program that release based on its content.

I don't send fusion CDs to stations that only play acoustic jazz, avant-garde CDs to stations that only program mainstream music, mainstream music to college stations that only play jam bands, etc.

Track length would be the next important consideration.

For those who aren't familiar, how does the current jazz radio chart system work and how do stations officially report their airplay?

The important jazz radio charts are the JazzWeek Top 50 Jazz Album Chart and the College Music Journal

(CMJ) Top 40 Jazz Chart. Both are published weekly and compiled using airplay data submitted online by reporting stations (the number of which can vary from week to week).

The JazzWeek chart, which reports both CD airplay and adds, is totally based on tallying the number of spins/adds reported weekly by an ongoing group of stations that were invited to be part of the panel. The higher the number of spins/adds a CD receives, the higher the CD's position.

At CMJ, the adds are straight forward (the five jazz CDs that received the most add reports in any given week are listed), but its jazz chart is much more complicated and nowhere near as transparent as JazzWeek's.

Reporting stations (paid subscribers to the magazine) submit a weekly jazz top 10 and the main chart is compiled using a formula that not only involves the number of stations that reported the CD, but also takes into consideration where a CD comes in on a station's top 10 report, and, more importantly, a reporting station's "weight," which is determined by its geographical location (i.e. in a rural area or a major urban center).

For example, coming in #10 at KCRW in Santa Monica, the heaviest weighted college station in North America, could carry more weight than the combined weight of all the top 10 reports of, say, 6 stations located in less populated areas.

It's not unusual for a CD that received three top 10 reports from stations located in the Los Angeles, the San Francisco Bay area and the New York City metropolitan area to make the chart, while a CD that received 10 top 10 reports from stations in tiny markets that same week doesn't make the chart at all.

About how many stations are on your radar actively programming jazz? Has that number changed significantly since you started focusing on radio promotion in 2005?

I have roughly 300 stations/program hosts in the U.S. and Canada in my database coded as actively programming jazz. 95+% are terrestrial. I also service a few select internet-only channels (e.g. TaintRadio, radiolO Real Jazz, MOJA Radio), the nationally syndicated programs Jazz After Hours with Jim Wilke and Jazz With Bob Parlocha, and the jazz channels of the cable programmer MusicChoice and the satellite broadcaster Sirius/XM.

Over the past few years, there's been a troubling national trend in which major market NPR affiliates replaced music programming with news/information/talk programming and three important outlets for jazz programming in urban markets either eliminated (i.e. WBEZ in Chicago and WDUQ in Pittsburgh) or drastically reduced (i.e. WGBH in Boston) the amount of jazz on those stations.

How often are you called on by stations to send digital promos vs. physical CDs?

Never. I still service all my broadcast contacts with CDs, either to put out into racks in their studios or, in a few cases, to be imported into a database that eventually might lead to having digital files accessed and broadcast.

The days of only servicing radio contacts with digital files via download links are still a ways off. Most broadcasters, with the exception of those who program online, satellite or cable channels (which represent at the most 3% of the people I service), require and prefer CDs.

Finally, can you speak to jazz radio's current role in our industry, particularly its influence as a mode for fans to discover new music, and where you think it goes from here in our increasingly digital world?

Radio, whether traditionally broadcast or streamed, remains my and many other people's preferred medium to be introduced to new sounds and I'm confident this will remain the case well into the future.

It has an immediacy, a reach, a lifespan, and a resonance that the written word, regardless of whether it's on the printed page or a Web site or blog, does not. This, along with changes in the frequency and availability of press coverage of jazz around the country, is a main reason I concentrate on radio promotion today after over

30 years as a publicist.

The jazz format has always been a minor part of the terrestrial radio spectrum and, as mentioned above, the trend towards replacing music with talk radio has severely hit stations that used to feature the music. However, more people (between 75 and 85% of the U.S. population if you consult Nielsen's latest data from 2011) tune in on a daily basis, whether in their cars or at home or at work.

When a CD is programmed at a radio station, it's played at least several times a week (if not daily, which is ideal). The average run for a jazz CD at a radio station is around six to eight weeks after it's added, although this varies from station to station.

Some program less CDs, play them more often, and keep them in longer, say, two to three months. Others, in an effort to introduce their listeners to as much new music as possible, program more CDs for less time, say, six to eight weeks each, and rotate in new music more frequently.

The aural visibility radio provides is an impression that resonates longer than reading something does. People who listen to radio are passionate and pro-active consumers. I can't tell you how many times over the years I've stayed in my car after arriving at a destination and listened to the radio until a track has ended so I can find out what it was I just heard. Usually I write the information down so I can Google the track and buy the music.

One of the intangible rewards of laboring in the trenches trying to get someone's music programmed is when a client tells me someone told him or her, "I heard a track from your CD on the radio!"

Learn more about Mitchell Feldman and his firm, Michell Feldman Associates (MFA), at <http://www.jazzradiopromotionandpublicity.com>. You can also find him on Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/JazzRadioPromotionPublicityAndConsulting>

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