

# How to be a Successful Music Producer

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## Intro

My name is Reggie Perry, Jr. p/k/a Nobody Famous. You probably never heard of me, but that is okay. I wanted to share the story of my journey as an artist and music producer in hopes that it will inspire someone out there to work hard and make their dreams a reality.

Please keep in mind, there is no single path to reaching your goals as a music producer. Everyone has different goals and each person's journey is different. In this piece I will share with you some of the steps that took me from making beats in my parent's basement to producing one of the most played songs on the radio in the world during the summer of 2013, a top record in several counties (including #1 in Austria, #7 in Germany and Switzerland), and everything in between.

## Education

Education is something I cannot stress enough, therefore it is something that I will spend a lot of time writing about. So often you can see an obvious disconnect between a person's goals in the music industry and their level of education about music and the music business (and business in general). I look at this disconnect as an opportunity -- that is if you are willing to act on it, of course (more on this later).

## Learning Your Craft

Learning your craft is the first step in forging a viable career in ANY industry. So often someone will send me a song in an unsolicited Twitter or SoundCloud message with a bit of text along the lines of "Check out my hit single..." followed by a link and a request that I follow them. Most of the time I don't listen to it, but every once in a while I do and it will not be up to par. Here and there may be a good song in the mix, but 99% of the time they are just not ready.

As a producer -- which are now a dime a dozen -- you have to create a competitive advantage for yourself. There are many ways you can do this, but the first and most obvious one is LEARNING YOUR CRAFT. I started producing before you could just hop on YouTube and watch beat making videos and download bootleg software. I read books about music production and what a music producer actually does. These days the line between music producer and beat maker is basically synonymous -- especially in hip-hop/rap, pop, etc. -- but I feel it is important to know the history of what a music producer is responsible for.

If you can guide the artist creatively and motivate them to reach their full potential, then you are already ahead of the game compared to a producer who just makes the beat, sets a 16 bar loop and leaves the artist in the studio to their own devices. Remember, your name is attached to everything you produce whether you just make the beat or are heavily involved in the entire process -- act accordingly.

Once you understand your job as a producer, you want to hone your skills both musically and technically. Let's break this into two parts.

## **Musically**

Take time to really learn (at least the basic of) music theory and an instrument. This part is really self explanatory. Learning these things will only make you more efficient in your creative process.

## **Technically**

This part is huge. These days there seems to be countless new hardware and software options hitting the shelves. I cannot stress the importance of picking one (or two) tools and dedicating yourself to learning every aspect of that tool. I started out using FL Studio and that was the only program I used. I first learned how to use it efficiently, then I would dig deeper and play with features that I normally didn't use so that I could add more tools to my arsenal. Years later I moved to Ableton Live and I spent months submerging myself in the program to learn everything I could about it -- and I am still learning.

This also can be applied to software instruments. Grab some demos of some synths and find one you like, buy it, and then learn everything you can about synthesis and how to create your own sounds. Presets are very useful -- I use them a lot -- but if you learn how to manipulate those and create your own sounds, those are skills that you can add to your production arsenal.

There is also the aspect of audio engineering and mixing. These are also important skills to add to your war chest. Take time to learn how to properly use compression, EQ, reverb, delays etc. as well as creating balanced mixes, recording techniques, signal flow, and the countless other aspects of audio engineering.

Will all this take a lot of time? Yes. Will it be worth it? Definitely. The more skills you have at your disposal, the more of a competitive advantage you will have over others.

## **Auxiliary Skills**

When I first started out trying to build a career, I didn't have any money to invest in myself. This meant that I couldn't hire graphic designers to design my album covers, or web developers to build my websites. So what did I do? I started learning how to do these things myself.

Over the years I dug into Photoshop and Illustrator to design my own artwork. I also built on my HTML and CSS skills so that I could do my own sites. I shot my own video blogs and used them as an opportunity to learn how to edit videos. When I first started out I was horrible, but over time I got better and now I get paid for providing graphic and web work to clients.

There are a ton of resources on the internet about design. If you have limited resources and a decent eye for design, this is something you may want to look into. Plus, these skills will only help you down the road.

## **Learn the Business**

After you build your skills and decided to take the next step in your career, you need to really take the time to learn what you're getting into. I have a degree in marketing, but I don't necessarily think you need to go to college and get a business degree (although, the networking opportunities on a college campus are tremendous).

What I do suggest is learning general business principles as well as how the music industry works. You want to get paid, right?

There are countless resources online where you can learn about how business works. Learn how to legally set up a business, accounting basics, tax basics, etc. Even if you eventually delegate these tasks to someone else, I cannot stress the importance of having a strong understanding of how everything works. It may not seem important now, but anything can happen and before you know it the money will start coming in and you will be scrambling to put everything together. It is just easier if the systems are already in place.

Secondly, this is the music BUSINESS. I feel a lot of aspiring producers and artists don't see the word BUSINESS. Are you registered with a performance rights organization (BMI, ASCAP, SESAC)? Do you know the importance of holding on to your publishing rights? There is absolutely no excuse not to know how the music business works with the amount of resources available to you. Research online, go to conferences, get a mentor. Do whatever you need to do to learn how the music business works.

Finally, this is just something that people would always say about me and I honestly think it was the biggest factor in any success I've ever had in this industry, PROFESSIONALISM.

Most people don't even think about this, but if you want to really stand out from the crowd, be professional. Do you do what you say you're going to do? How about going above and beyond? In your communications do you use proper English and respond to business correspondences on time? You may think these things do not matter, but they do. First impressions are crucial. These days it seems like everyone raps or makes beats, so you have to differentiate yourself.

If you meet a new contact, send them a short note saying you're pleased to meet them and that you would like to keep in touch -- but don't ask them to do anything for you at first. If it is someone you can learn from, ask them what you can do to help them because you'd like to learn more about the business from them. Many times people are very willing to help. If it is someone who is constantly bombarded by people wanting something from them, they will look at you as a breath of fresh air.

### **Take Risks**

This is something you really have to decide on for yourself and how it fits into your life. I am from a small town in Georgia, but the style of music I was making in the mid-2000's was a lot different from what you would hear on the radio. I was young, fresh out of college and I wanted to take my career to the next level. I would do talent shows and such around Atlanta but people really wasn't feeling me because I wasn't making music that sounded like everyone else -- so I decided to move to Los Angeles.

Most of the labels are in LA and NYC, and I looked at it as a chance to put myself in a better position to make the connections I needed to succeed.

Did it pay off? 95% of the big opportunities in my career came as a result of my move to LA.

I am not saying you have to move to LA, but you should consider looking at your style of music and which scenes in the country is thriving that is similar to the type of music you make. Once you find a place, start to make connections by visiting that city and meeting people in person. Ultimately you have to decide on what is best for you, but more than likely it won't happen over the internet alone.

## **Networking (In Real Life)**

Today with social networking people think they can make solid connections solely online. Yes, you can make a connection here and there, but nothing will ever replace real life, in person relationships. If you want to be a part of an industry, you need to be seen in person.

There are several events and festivals that you can attend to meet people and network. Once you meet those people, you want to take the time to build those relationships. I touched on this earlier, but here is a great article [on Forbes about networking](#).

## **Create Your Own Opportunities**

This is very important to me. Tweeting 1,000 people a link to your song or new beat probably won't do much in terms of creating opportunities. If anything, you will just annoy people. At the same time, you can't just upload a beat and hope that your favorite artist finds it. You have to actively seek out opportunities to take your career to the next level. If you are having a hard time finding opportunities, create your own.

For example, I started going to beat battles and open mics to perform and to meet the people who were running them. After some time building those relationships, I approached them with proposals to collaborate on our own events. I pulled in other artists in my hometown that had a larger following than me and had them perform or host the events. I would repeat this process, giving others an opportunity to expand their network and fan base, while simultaneously building my own.

I did the same thing on the production side when I moved to LA. I wanted to build my name as a producer, so I would reach out to any artist I could find who was generating some buzz. I asked if they would work on a song with me for a compilation album I was producing, and most were more than happy to do so. None of them were super big at the time, but a few of them went on to blow up and I had the opportunity to work with them.

## **Forge Your Own Lane**

As cliché as it sounds, you have to think outside the box to stand out. So many people focus on being a top music producer or an upper echelon artist, but there is a lot of money that can be made by being open to different possibilities that revolve around music.

For me, I worked with youth for a long time. When I returned to Georgia from California, I did some brainstorming on how I could combine my passion for music with my passion for working with youth. I started a program teaching at-risk and urban kids music production and songwriting. I reached out to my network that I had spent years cultivating and within 3 months I was running the program full time, making money while teaching kids how to make beats and write songs. I worked with over 1,500 students and had a blast doing it.

My point is, don't be afraid to look for (or create) opportunities to forge your own lane. Not everyone of us is going to be the next Pharrell, Timbaland, or Kanye, but you can be the next you.

## **Conclusion**

Ultimately, you are in control of your own destiny. As long as YOU do everything in your power to learn and create opportunities for yourself, the rest will undoubtedly fall in place. Stay focused and make those dreams come true. Onward.