

The Free Soundtrack

The Top 5 Ways to Sell Your Film on a \$0 Marketing Budget

by filmmaker Ryan Gielen

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The Free Soundtrack

5 great ways to sell your film on a \$0 marketing budget

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Special Thanks to my producers and collaborators

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www.indieflix.com, www.theorchard.com

Special thanks to the entire indie film community,

For your generosity, commitment, and undeniable talent.

Please share this eBook with anyone you feel may benefit from reading the anecdotes and ideas within.



A Little About Me

I'm a filmmaker by birth, a film marketer by necessity. My bonafides are in the appendix, but this eBook focuses exclusively on my experience self-distributing my first feature film, **The Graduates**.

Vital Stats: The Graduates

Synopsis:

- Four friends drive to "Senior Week" in Ocean City, Maryland the day after graduating high school for one last hurrah before leaving for college. Over a booze-soaked week friendships crumble, relationships begin and end, and the guys learn that life goes on, whether they're ready or not.

Production Budget:

- \$150,000

Marketing Budget:

- \$0

Festival Accolades:

- Winner, Best Comedy, Seattle True Indie Film Fest
- Winner, Director Discovery Award, Rhode Island International Film Festival

Release date:

- May 1, 2009

Biggest Marketing Victories:

- 20,000 email addresses
- Over 7,500 DVD's sold
- Debuted as #1 comedy on Hulu
- Remained in Hulu top ten comedies all-time for 4 years (still top 15, after 5 years)
- Coverage in major newspapers, blogs, websites and over 200 print & broadcast outlets nationwide

The \$0 Marketing Budget

Scenario 1:

You made your film. You put every dollar on the screen. Traveled to a couple festivals (out of pocket, of course). No distribution deal, no plans. Now you're staring at your bookshelf, wondering if your film is going to end up there, forever. Marketing Budget: \$0 planned.

Scenario 2:

You made your film. You put almost every dollar on the screen. Traveled to many festivals, maybe even some majors, maybe won some awards. Courted by a handful of distributors, landed a distribution deal or signed with an aggregator. Deal doesn't really pay, distributor/aggregator has huge roster and/or tiny marketing budget. You see your film heading toward a release, then fading into obscurity amidst a sea of independent releases. Marketing Budget: \$0 planned.



We've been there.

We've sold our film despite the massive challenges of a \$0 marketing budget.

We want to share some of our best moves with you.

If you are willing to fight for your film,
you can sell your film.

THE FREE SOUNDTRACK

This eBook will layout five killer concepts for online and real world marketing that will cost you almost nothing to execute, will expose your film to thousands of people, get them excited, and turn them into advocates for you and your film.

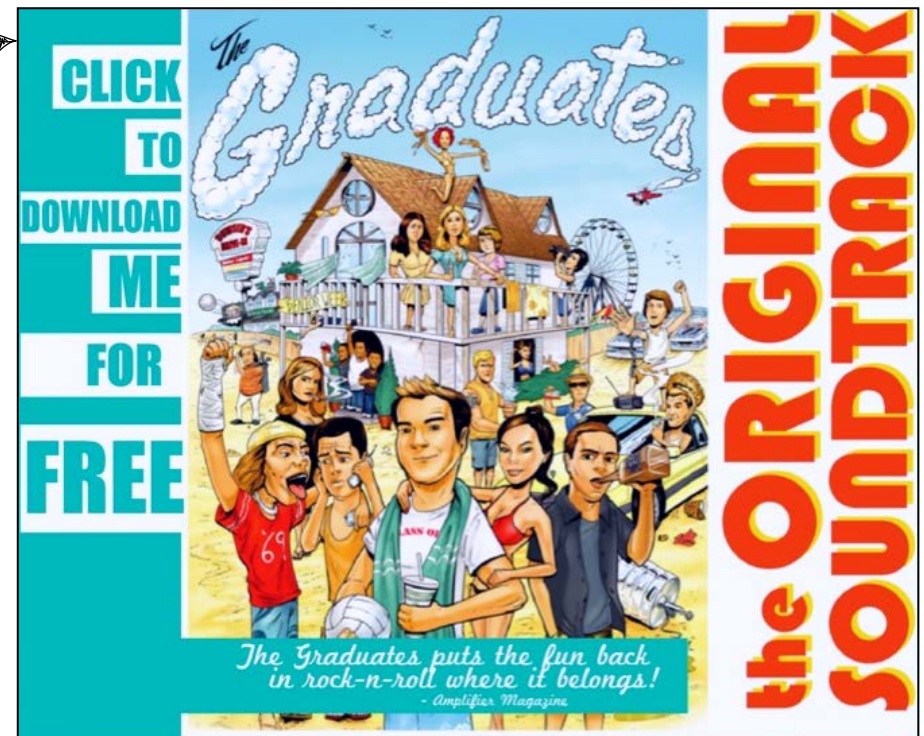
1 The FREE SOUNDTRACK

We licensed music from 15 indie bands for a 24-song soundtrack, and gave it away for free.

- ★ **20,000 downloads to date**
Cost to us? Nothing.
- ★ **People played & replayed songs over and over again**
Every time they do, they see our movie title and connect with the film!
- ★ **People bonded with tone & genre through the music**
They become fans/advocates before they see a trailer!
- ★ **Blogs and websites picked up the giveaway**
Our tiny film had a global reach, overnight.
- ★ **Automatic reach into related demos**
The Graduates was promoted by music fans to other music fans, people we would never reach alone with just film-related promos.

Bottom Line

Can you name one promotion you've ever done that cost nothing and brought you 20,000 fans in a few months?



For the first YEAR of the film's release we traded the download for an email address. For the second year- and in perpetuity- people only have to click on the album image in order to download.

1B

The FREE SOUNDTRACK

We licensed music from 15 indie bands for a 24-song soundtrack, and gave it away for free.

★ What about the bands?

Our pitch was simple: give us one song and we'll introduce you to hundreds of thousands of fans. You won't have to lift a finger. And you're welcome to use any and all footage from the film for music videos.

Between the free soundtrack download and the release of the film across a dozen platforms and theaters in ten cities, the film (and subsequently, the soundtrack) has been experienced by over 1,000,000 people.

We love indie bands, and we wanted to make sure any promotion we did would benefit them as much as the film. No artist wants to give away their content for free, but the relative low cost (1-3 songs) combined with our ability to get our film seen, winning awards in festivals, and our sincere desire to promote the bands made it a no-brainer.

So how do the bands benefit? Once someone downloads the free soundtrack and imports it into iTunes, iTunes will suggest more songs by the same artists, driving up awareness and hopefully sales. Further, if someone connects with free music, they'll interact with the band's website, Facebook page, and, of course, their other music.

In short, we took 1, 2 or 3 songs, and spent two years introducing the bands that gave us those songs to over a million people, and we did it at our expense, not theirs. Pretty solid deal for almost any indie band.



SAVE SENIOR WEEK



2

The RIGHTEOUS CAUSE

We started Save Senior Week, an organization for high school grads who want to party in Ocean City, Maryland.

- ✧ We set up a booth on the boardwalk in Ocean City during Senior Week, and collected email addresses of concerned Senior Weekers and fellow advocates.
- ✧ We sold DVD's of the world's only Senior Week movie, The Graduates, at this booth.
- ✧ Made fun, vibrant t-shirts and sold those with our DVD's. Senior Weekers wore them instantly, and repeatedly.
- ✧ Took pics of the Senior Weekers wearing our shirts and buying our DVD's, uploaded to Facebook, invited everyone to tag themselves on Facebook each night.
- ✧ Pitched articles on our work saving Senior Week to major local papers, got press and radio coverage for the cause, and the film.

www.SaveSeniorWeek.com

2B

The RIGHTEOUS CAUSE

We started **Save Senior Week**, an organization for high school grads who want to party in Ocean City, Maryland.



★ The Value of Tangents

The Graduates takes place in Ocean City, Maryland during the fabled Senior Week(s) of summer, the first four weeks of June when all Maryland, Pennsylvania, Delaware and Virginia high school graduates drive to the beach and spend seven days destroying livers and relationships.

Where there's a party, there will always be angry grownups trying to kill the buzz. In Ocean City, this means police, politicians and parents, The Three P's of the party apocalypse.

But the grads don't have anyone to fight for their right to party. So we created Save Senior Week, an advocacy group devoted to keeping young people aware of the threats against their DelMarVa birthright.

We set up a booth in partnership with a boardwalk restaurant, and sold our t-shirts. The grads were incredibly excited that someone was finally encouraging them to rock.

They bought t-shirts, wore them all week, sent their friends to our booth, posted about us all over Facebook, and gave us their email addresses to keep in touch.

We happened to have The Graduates DVD available for purchase at the same booth. Grads fell in love with our cause and bought the DVD as a tangent because of the goodwill and excitement generated by our work.



Bottom Line

Tangential promotions are a great way to redirect the goodwill people feel for a concept, toward your film.

Do it right and you don't have to push the film at all, people will discover it while interacting with your tangential promotion.

3

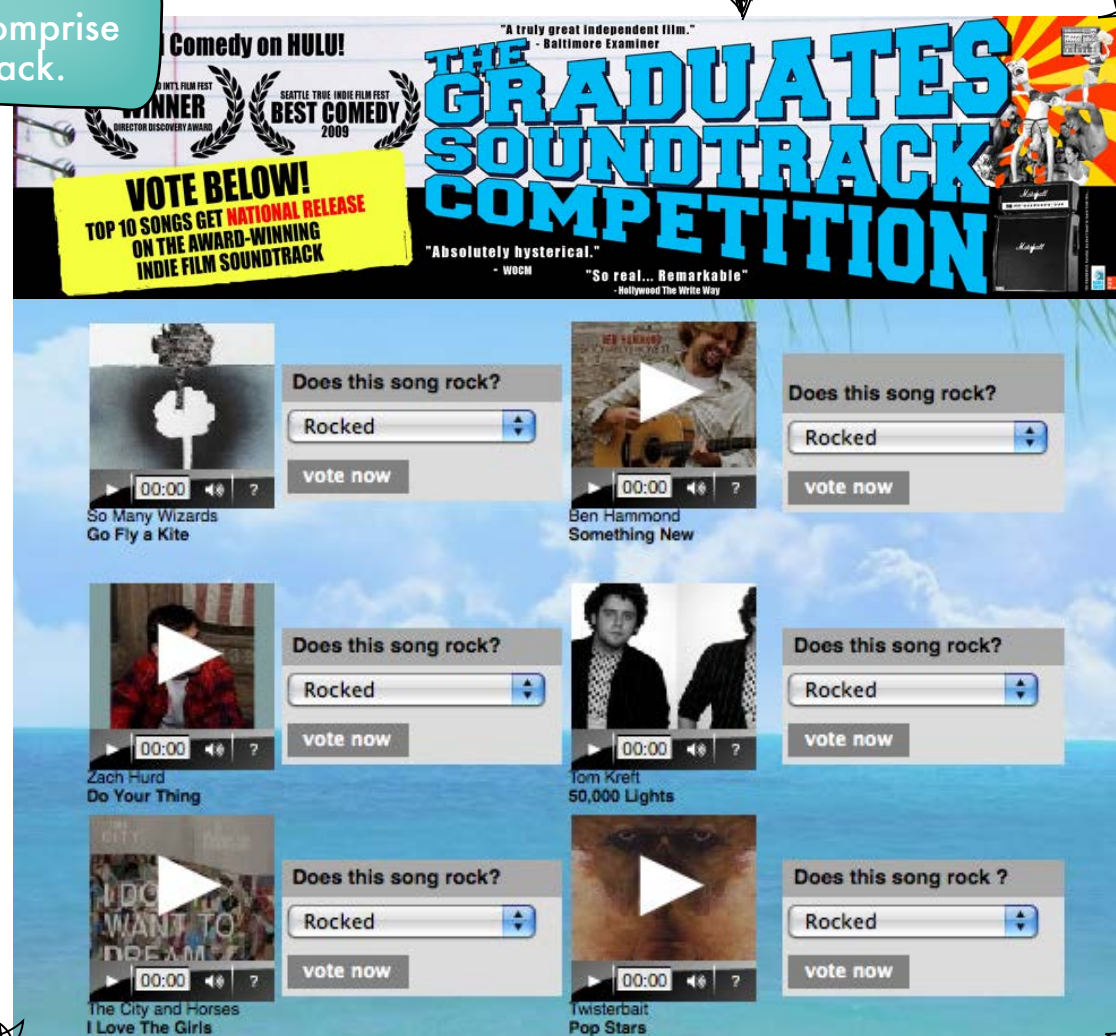
The CONTEST

Online contest for indie bands: winners comprise second volume of The Graduates Soundtrack.

- ★ Hosted online contest for 40 indie bands- whittled from a pool of 750 submissions. The winners comprised "The Graduates Soundtrack: Volume 2"
- ★ Bands invited their fans to vote once a day on our official Graduates website: 40 bands drove 30,000 visitors for 1.2 million page views.
- ★ We embedded the YouTube trailer and the entire film (hosted on Hulu) on the landing page: ads are embedded in both players, bringing in a little money with every view.
- ★ "The Graduates Soundtrack: Volume 2" was released on a two-disc CD and iTunes, and links to existing and new albums from every band.
- ★ Total time invested: about one week and an ongoing relationship with certain bands.

Bottom Line

The band contest is another no-brainer. Indie bands need exposure, and your movie needs music. Bands will come along for the ride if you can bring the audience.



4 The BOLD MOVE

Free condoms. Boom.

- ★ We gave away **free custom condoms** at screenings, festivals and events. They were a huge hit.
- ★ They're bolder than flyers. **Risque, but positive.**
- ★ The stunt got huge laughs, and people always remember when you can **make them laugh**.
- ★ People don't throw them out because of perceived value, even though they have no intention of using them. **They advertise your film for weeks**, even months.
- ★ We sold out several screenings handing out custom condoms, but the opening night screening at the **Rhode Island International Film Festival** was the biggest win: a Wednesday night... in Providence, Rhode Island... while local colleges were home for the summer... and we packed the house with one day of canvassing.



"The Graduates: always wear protection in the sun"

Bottom Line

The only downside is the cost, (unless you buy huge quantities). But, the upside is awesomeness, or, in grownup terms, branding.

By doing something bold you brand your film as something exciting. You're telling the audience your film will push buttons, and that brings them to the theater.

5

The FREE STICKERS

We took funny (some would argue juvenile, or... obnoxious) quotes from the film and put them on neon stickers.



★ **We included a handful of stickers in every DVD shipment...**
and handed them out in Ocean City, Maryland to Senior Weekers.

★ **Stickers became the must-have accessory on the boardwalk!**
Senior Weekers proudly displayed the funny (juvenile, obnoxious) neon stickers on themselves, their cars, even their hotel room doors (we've been told).

★ **Senior Weekers came by our booth three and four days in a row...**
to replace lost stickers- if we couldn't sell the DVD, t-shirt, or soundtrack at first visit, we sold it on their second or third visit.

★ **Stickers are cheap!**
We used cheap material because we couldn't afford anything better. Next time we're giving away bumper stickers, so our branding will last for years, not weeks.

★ **Check out the damage at...**
www.Facebook.com/thegraduates or www.Facebook.com/SaveSeniorWeek

Bottom Line

This simple exercise is repeatable at film festivals, on college tours, at alternative venue screenings...

Warning: Nobody wants to be a boring walking billboard for your movie. People want to make a statement. Make the stickers catchy, bold, and loud and people will plaster them everywhere.

ADVENTURES OF POWER



Bonus Example: Ari Gold!

The Backstory

Ari Gold broke onto the scene with this one-minute short film, **CULTURE**. The short is too awesome to describe, you should just go experience it for yourself on YouTube.

He parlayed the success of **CULTURE** into financing for a feature, and a couple years later his funny and heartfelt comedy **Adventures of Power** premiered at Sundance.

Though the film starred Jane Lynch, Michael McKean and Adrian Grenier, Ari self-distributed to make sure the film received the personal, long-term attention it deserved.

He pieced together a distribution team from other indie productions*, and self-distributed with the help of small, hungry, independent distribution companies, using the concepts of "The Free Soundtrack" and "FTW: Filmmarketing for The Web".

Using Free to Make Money

YouTube

Ari and his team created an entire 70-video YouTube promotional campaign featuring original videos, deleted scenes, constant updates and interaction- all free to the end user. Their videos have received over 500K views, they've gained over 2,000 subscribers, and the videos led to thousands of new Facebook fans. Three of his videos even reached the front page of YouTube, officially going viral, where they were shared and spread by over 10,000 new fans.

The Free Soundtrack

Ethan Gold (composer, and Ari's brother) agreed to give away the original soundtrack for three months leading up to the release via Bandcamp.com. Over 2,000 people downloaded the soundtrack, and at no additional cost to Ari and Ethan, they suddenly had 2,000 more fans.

The Contest

Adventures of Power is a comedy about a guy with a dream: to become the world's greatest air drummer. Ari and his team partnered with Drum Channel, the world's number one drumming website, to launch "Power's Air Drum Battle." Fans upload a video (to YouTube) of themselves air drumming their favorite song, link it to **Adventures of Power**, and have their friends watch and vote. The contest was a huge success and drove tons of organic traffic to the film and the **Adventures of Power** website.



Bottom Line

Even though his movie was loaded with "name actors," Ari's marketing budget could not compete with that of studio films.

Ari and his team utilized **FREE** content and social media to build the foundation for an incredible DVD and digital release.

Check out the clips, trailers and all of Ari's work using the links below, and support a true indie!

Links:

YouTube Filmmaker Page:
<http://tinyurl.com/28kpihw>

YouTube Film Page:
<http://tinyurl.com/44ogv3o>

Adventures of Power
<http://tinyurl.com/3ks8d5t>

Buy the DVD:
<http://tinyurl.com/4ex9mvx>

*Including the Gielen brothers ;)

Call to Action



The tips in this eBook represent only a handful of the things we did to build an audience for The Graduates.

These marketing ideas will not align with the content of every film, but they're not intended to do so. Instead, think of them as jumping-off-points, as templates that can inspire ideas more appropriate to your film.

The Big Goal of each idea are what counts, and they are, always:

1. Build awareness

It's a crowded digital world. The greatest threat you face is not piracy, it's obscurity. Be desperate to get people to interact with your marketing. Give away free pieces to ensure the audience will interact with your film.

2. "Build your list"

Grow your email list, Facebook fans, Twitter followers and YouTube subscribers with every promotional effort. This will serve you on this film, and the next, and the next.

3. Entertain People

Marketing should entertain. This is crucial, yet often overlooked. Marketing is NOT about forcefeeding information to an audience, it's about winning them over. Your press kit is probably super-helpful, but nobody's going to forward it to a hundred friends. Entertain them and they'll advocate for you over and over again.

Bottom Line

Know that if you are willing to put in the time and energy, you will find an audience for your film.

Prepare for your release by creating promotions that build awareness, build a list, and entertain.

Do. It. Yourself.



Build Awareness

Build Your List

Entertain People

Questions? Feedback? Funny cat videos from YouTube?

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For more info on my films, please use the links below:



The Graduates

www.thegraduatesmovie.com



Turtle Hill, Brooklyn

www.turtlehillbrooklyn.com



Drinking Games

www.drinkinggamesmovie.com

Find these films everywhere films are sold (or streamed):



→ **THANK YOU :)**

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