

CHAPTER ONE

Get in the Stream



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Because playing to your strengths will take you much
further than trying to copy what somebody else is doing
just to fit in..”*

One of my favorite channels to watch on television is the nature channel. Even though I've never been into hunting, fishing, or camping, I've always been fascinated by the behavior of wild animals.

I remember watching a documentary about grizzly bears that showed everything they do to hunt and feed themselves. In general, the bears had to work pretty hard to eat every day, but there was one time when they didn't. And that was during the salmon migration. Every four years, millions of salmon returned from the ocean in an attempt to reach the freshwater rivers and creeks they were born in so

they could spawn and reproduce. Their journey was extremely difficult, often forcing them through several smaller streams and narrow passages where the water was very shallow.

This is where the bears came in. Just as the salmon planned on making their journey every four years to spawn, the bears planned on being there to catch the salmon. In comparison to the normal meal they had to catch, salmon were easy. All the bears had to do was stand in the middle of a narrow or shallow stream that the salmon were traveling through and the salmon were right there on top of each other. Since the salmon often had to swim upstream and against the current, they were slower and easier to catch. It was so easy that sometimes the salmon even jumped out of the water and right into the mouth of a bear that was standing there. Yes, the bear is a skilled hunter, but what mattered the most in catching salmon that time of year was being in the right place at the right time. There were so many salmon crossing their paths, and such a high chance of success, that the usually highly-competitive bears barely fought amongst each other. There was nothing to fight about because food was plentiful.

Artists having success on social media is very similar to bears having success in hunting salmon. You may be highly skilled in your craft, but that means nothing if you're not where the action is. Just as bears go to the high traffic places to hunt salmon, you have to go to high traffic places to find

your audience. And where are those high traffic places? On social media platforms like twitter, instagram, facebook, and youtube. But you can't access them if you're not there.

Are there annoying people on social media? Yes. Can social media become a big drain of your free time? Absolutely. But just as the chance of drowning or fighting doesn't stop the bears from getting in the stream to catch salmon, the chance of conflict or negativity shouldn't stop you from being on social media. As long as you know why you're there and what you're doing, you can make it work for you. And despite the fact that I've put a great deal of work into writing this book, I have to admit that none of it will work for you if you're not willing to participate in social media. In other words, you have to get in the stream.

Here's why.

THE BENEFITS OF GETTING IN THE STREAM

Captive Audience - Once upon a time, a person's network was only as large as their social circle in the city they lived in. Careers were built from the ground up. Dues were paid and followers were gained locally long before that artist was exposed to larger national and international audiences. Those days are long gone. At the time of writing, Facebook has 2.7 billion users, Youtube has 2.3 billion users, Instagram has 1 billion users, and Twitter has 192 million users. That's a huge captive audience that any artist can tap into. And while each

user may have different tastes and interests, it's pretty much guaranteed that there's a group of people on each platform who would be into what you do. All you have to do is be good at what you do and put yourself out there enough for people to find you. Just as the bear sees a stream full of salmon as an opportunity, you must see the billions of people on social media as an opportunity.

Less Work - For traditional brick and mortar businesses, having a strong online presence isn't a requirement. In fact, most can be successful simply by having a great product and location. But for the majority of artists today, it's nearly impossible to make an impact without social media. Without a social media presence, artists are required to constantly be on the scene locally, establish and maintain amazing relationships with their peers, and promote themselves heavily at every local event and platform. Even for the most dedicated artist, that's a lot of work. And there's no guarantee that there are even enough people to support what they do in their scene. This is why I advise artists to take the time to build their online presence. Not *instead of* their local presence, but *in addition to* their local presence. Why? Because leveraging social media will help them reach more people with less work than trying to leverage their limited free time every day in their local scene. Obviously, it doesn't happen overnight. But the sooner you start using social media to build your online presence, the sooner you will get out of the cycle of trying to be everywhere at once locally. Instead of

trying to push people to support you locally, your social media platforms will pull them to you with much less effort.

No Cost - There are a large percentage of businesses that started out when the most effective way to get more eyes on their products and services was to spend money on traditional advertising like radio, television, and street promotion. But the last fifteen years of social media have shaken up that entire way of thinking. Now, creative businesses can instead spend their time and energy building their social media presence and reach the same number of people for a fraction of the cost. After all, why pay for traditional advertising that casts a wide net but often fails to target the specific people they're trying to reach? I've seen this shift in my career as well. In the past, it was a must to print and pass out physical flyers to promote a live event or release, but now it can be done just as effectively using social media. Unfortunately, many artists trap themselves into a cycle of spending money on traditional promotion because they don't want to commit to learning the nuances of social media. But the less they know, the more it costs them. All of that changes when they get in the stream and learn how to make social media work for them. And in most instances, it costs them nothing.

Now let's talk about how to put yourself in the stream.

HOW TO GET IN THE STREAM

Know Your Strengths - A common complaint from artists who are hesitant to use social media is that they don't know what to say. I can relate to their concern because it took me a while to find my own voice on social media. Eventually I realized that I was only nervous because I subconsciously thought that who I was wasn't interesting enough. Believing that nobody cared about what I had to say kept me far away from social media for the longest. Thankfully I realized that I didn't need to entertain people, I just needed to be myself. And the key to being myself is *knowing my strengths*. I stopped focusing on what I couldn't do well and started focusing on what I could do well. That realization caused a huge shift in how I did things online.

If you're an artist who is hesitant about diving into social media, try not to compare yourself to other people. Instead, focus on who you are and what you do well. Focus on your hobbies, interests, and what excites you. Because playing to your strengths will take you much further than trying to copy what somebody else is doing just to fit in.

Playing to your strengths on social media also means choosing platforms that fit your unique personality and skill set. If you're good at writing, then blogging might be a good way to express yourself. If you're good at photography, then Instagram might be a good platform for you. Shooting and editing videos? Try Youtube. Are you good at coming up with

funny quotes and random observations? Try Twitter. No matter what your communication style is, there is a social media platform that plays to your strengths. Choose what best fits you and get started.

Develop a Strategy - Once you've defined who you are and what your strengths are, the next move is to develop a content creation strategy. In other words, what kind of content can you create around your passion and how often can you create it? You don't need to have all the answers at the beginning but you do need to brainstorm and start writing down your best ideas. For example, I love writing, so I've always used blogging to tell my story. When the popularity of blogging started to decline and podcasting started to explode, I decided to create a weekly podcast called *Super Duty Tough Work* with my co-host Illogic. The content I create on my podcast isn't much different from the blogs I used to write, it's just presented differently and in a different format. Since I was already a recording artist and good at production, creating audio podcasts was a natural fit because it played to my strengths. I also write and self-publish books, which is a natural progression from blogging. This is in addition to all of the music that I release every year. These are just examples of the types of content that I like to create and share with regularity, but as you can see my content creation strategy follows my strengths. Once you've written down all of your ideas, try to figure out how difficult they will be to execute and how often you can create them. You don't need to be perfect,

you only need a plan you can execute. Some things will work, others won't. Don't sweat it. Just work your plan consistently and the results will follow.

Follow Your Industry - One of the easiest ways to acclimate yourself to social media is to follow your industry. That means that the majority of people you follow should be your peers and people who do what you do. It also means that you should be following websites, blogs, and group pages that target people who do what you do. There are many benefits of this approach. First, seeing the content they post every day will give you ideas on how to improve your own posts. Second, once you start socializing with those accounts, you will start to build valuable relationships. Finally, it will inspire you to get better at your craft.

As an artist who has been releasing music for twenty years, I owe every large opportunity I've been given to the relationships I formed with my peers. I've never been put on by a stranger, only people I knew already. But those opportunities never would've happened if I wasn't immersed in my scene, both locally and nationally. Follow your industry and build with your peers. Before you know it the opportunities will come to you.

CHAPTER ONE EXERCISES

- Start the process of determining what your strengths and interests are. Then write down what kinds of media you feel the most comfortable creating. Next, determine which social media platforms match your strengths and interests and create accounts on them.
- Once you've created an account on your chosen social media platform, start to find people and outlets in your industry. Follow 10-20 news outlets in your industry and 10-20 of the top names in your field. Then do the same thing locally.
- Start engaging. But remember, be positive and helpful, not snarky or negative. Share any content you think is great and add on to the conversations.
- Start to make notes on the types of content being created by the people you're following. Make notes of anything you think you can create for yourself. Make notes of any topics that you have a unique opinion on and can cover yourself.
- Establish your content creation strategy by writing down at least two to three types of content that you can create and how often you think you can create it. You want to create things that are a reflection of your craft and what you want people to know you for.