

DOING BUSINESS WITH AUSTRALIA

The final page or so of this publication that we prepared especially for Australia is devoted to those of you who want to do business with Australian artists, labels, companies, mini-moguls, promoters, agents, managers, emerging entrepreneurs and venues. It's based on what I've learned as a 23 year veteran of Australia, having moved here in 1981,

First you must realize that we're the same size as the US, but with our cities running along the coast and Sydney being the main city for music, Melbourne a close second. We're half a world away and a day ahead so as I'm writing this Monday at noon, it's Sunday - 8 pm in New York, 7pm in Austin and 5 pm in Los Angeles as well as being 1 am in London. We hate being called by idiots overseas who can't tell time or day-so use www.timeanddate.com/worldclock.

Second, we hate to be told "how we do it in [insert city]". The worst thing you can say to an Aussie if you're over here is "Back in Los Angeles, we..." because we always do things differently here anyway. Our water even swirls in the opposite direction to yours going down the drain in the Northern hemisphere.

If you're down with that, then there are a few cultural things you need to absorb. We're really no different to you in English speaking countries, except, where Americans like to analyse themselves openly and freely admit to going to a shrink, proudly telling of their problems, we just tend to take the piss out of each other and hold in the unnecessary details about our mental health. In other words, if an Australian meets you and addresses you as "G'day you bloody Yank bastard!" He's merely being affectionate.

Where Americans take and return every call and are happy to say 'No.', in Australia, if someone doesn't want to deal with you, they just won't take or return your call. It may seem strange but we hate to say no. Unlike the Japanese to whom no means no, maybe probably means no and yes doesn't always mean yes. It took me a while to not get offended by people not responding but as soon as you realize that it's not personal, it's more to avoid embarrassment or because the person lacks courage, you'll get over it.

Now we come to the matter of timing. It's a joke that our national standard is "Near enough is good enough" and the general attitude is "Not to worry mate, she'll be right" which loosely translates in the Mexican "Manana", which in turns means maybe soon, maybe not probably sometime, my friend." This applies more to getting a tradesman to fix something than the way the music business does business. You'll find that when you communicate over to us by email, we're pretty rapid in getting back to you, usually overnight. And if you fine tune talking to us and faxing or mailing us in our business hours, things can progress very rapidly. That's because we've always suffered that 'tyranny of distance' from our overseas markets that caused delays in communicating which we overcame with technology.

About the money. This week, the Australian dollar is worth US\$.77, or 77 cents. Or if you look at it the other way around one dead US President is worth A\$1.30. Our economy is recovering and the exchange rate is the highest it's been against the Yank buck in seven years! Only a short time ago, the exchange rate was A\$1-US\$.48 which prevented us from importing overseas artists in the concert market, inhibited us from traveling to the US, UK or Europe and made imported music more expensive. But that's changed now and is why you see well over 100 Australians and 25+ New Zealanders registered.

One of things that is not generally understood by overseas music industry pros looking at our continent is why certain



styles of music don't work over here and why we are often the first territory to have an odd release go #1. A few truths here, though we do speak English, some things are lost on us. And because our multicultural population is so diverse, we often get major hits from Greek, Italian, Chinese and Indian artists.

Reggae doesn't work. We're just not that island or that black a populous and our white population just didn't adopt Bob Marley as a patron saint nor his contemporaries as apostles. Hip hop and rap have some audience but it's not overwhelming.

Blues is taken seriously here with our own artists like Dave Hole and Jeff Lang carrying the religion back to the US. Jazz less so but our hero in that genre is James Morrison whose trumpet has been heard round the world and has his own label. Dance is huge here with massive raves every week, overseas DJs hauled in with regularity and a major retail slab devoted to it. As for the Grateful Dead, jam bands, Phish, the Allman Brothers and their ilk, they never took off here much to my regret. Australian concert audiences want a lot of action, not guitar noodling and 80 minute songs. Besides, we're pretty spoiled with hard rocking bands that take no prisoners at the barricades in the front of the stages.

Radio is a different matter. Most commercial stations of any large ratings play Hits and Memories, AOR rather than AC, and tend to go for an older demographic. The ones with money. Things have started to change though with the Austereo Network (compare it to Clear Channel with a major station in every city) getting pounded by the Nova stations which have taken over in the ratings in Sydney and are eroding the Austereo share elsewhere.

You won't find the sort of variety on the radio dial that you get in the US. There's almost no country music except in the rural areas. Dance is not that hot on radio as its own format though it's mixed in with AC or rock formats. Jazz is fringe and tends to be left, like classical, to the national government broadcaster, the ABC, which runs networks around Australia in various styles.

But youth music is another story and the key teller is the Triple J Network, which transmits in all major cities and throughout most of the rest of Australia's smaller towns as

well. It doesn't play the sort of music you'll find on commercial radio and it introduces with regularity the trends that young listeners adopt rather than following others leads. It is commercial free other than plugging its own products- and also deals with youth issues and politics though is far more music oriented than chat. It often hits 40% Australian content and has an Unearthed program which goes around the country trying to find new artists and give them airplay.

Which brings us to the matter of Australian content on radio. We used to have a quota which was 25% and was mandatory but often outwitted by stations playing most of their Australian music midnight to dawn. Stations would also have late night local music programs or play the same Aussie standards like 'Eagle Rock' or 'Cool Change' or hits from the 60s, 70s 80s. Now the local content quota is voluntary and nearer 30% in most cases. We still complain that newer music doesn't get a look in to commercial radio but there are alternatives.

In Sydney, a major non-commercial station called FBI just started up with as much transmitter power as the big boys but with a 50% Australian content and half of that local. We also have college radio stations but the big influences in other cities like Melbourne are community radio such as 3PBS and 3RRR, Brisbane's 4ZZZ and others. Punk shows, dance programs, blues and harder edged rock find their way through community radio which is a great supporter of homegrown artists.

On TV, we used to have the Sunday night legend Countdown which featured clips and live performances at 6:30 but no more. Now there are weekend clip programs on a Top 40 vein for the younger set on network TV and the long late night program Rage from 11 pm to past dawn on the national TV broadcaster ABC. Rage has been around for 20 years and is critical for breaking new artists and local content.

On the pay TV side, we have a wealth of programming. MTV in a more Aussie style is 24 hours; Channel V is far more Australian and does great promotions out in the field with a concert bus touring the country towns and live appearances a weekly occurrence with visiting overseas bands as well as local heroes. We did have a country music TV station which downsized and is a part of a more general 24 hour channel called MusicMax. And in the next few months, VH-1 will launch on cable and satellite which should attract the older crowd with hits and memories again. As for satellite radio, we don't have it. We do have music radio on cable, but no dedicated broadcasts by bird to car. We also don't have digital radio though it's been promised.

Australians don't veg on the couch as much as their American counterparts, opting to hit the beach and surf or bushwalk rather than sucking on the glass teat. And of course, we're a live music crowd too with a wealth of pubs and clubs catering to our original music and a rash of festivals for the summer season - your Northern winter.

So if you're planning to do business Down Under, remember what you've gleaned from this publication and our accompanying AustralAsian Music Industry Directory. Or if you're just looking to come South by South by South and enjoy our unique country, we hope that we've added to your pleasure and knowledge.

Cheers,

PHIL TRIPP-Publisher