

## Why your visual identity is important as a musician

You are a music maker, a largely aural experience. But humans are multi-sensory creatures, therefore you also need to appeal to your audience's vision, their sense of aesthetics, and increasingly, their personal values in your online content.

While to some, 'Branding' might seem like a dirty word, it is worth instead thinking of branding, design, photography and video as visual embodiments of your music and your own message as an artist.

Working on your branding is not a quick or easy task; it means investing in yourself as an artist and as a small business.

Where possible it may require some financial investment (ie: professional photography, design, videography etc) but it definitely will require time investment for you to explore who you are, how you want to present yourself and your music in a world where artists need to be increasingly personable.

That doesn't mean you need to share your actual personal life, but a certain amount of your interests, beliefs and inspirations etc should be visible in your online presence to feel authentic.

### A visual embodiment of your music

Generally, a musician's branding can be broken down into three categories;

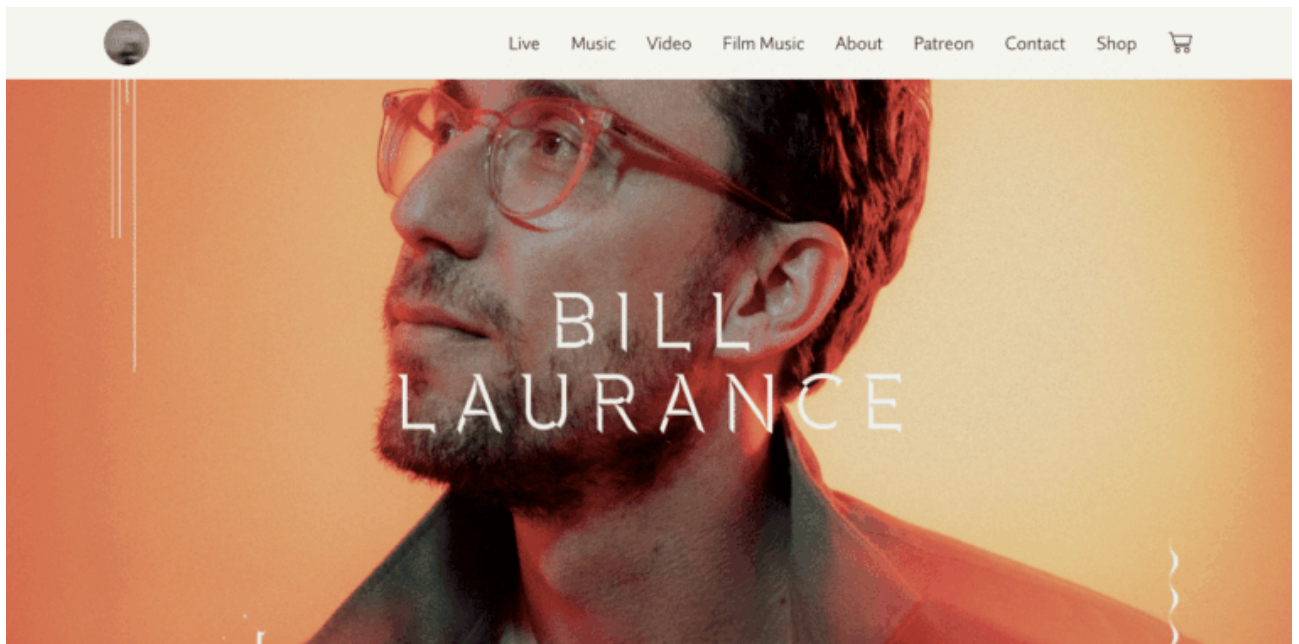
- Graphic design
- Imagery/ Visual assets
- Personality/ Voice

Design and Imagery (photography, video) –these are vehicles to express yourself on an additional plane, amplifying what you have to say, and making it travel further. A cohesive visual identity across all platforms will make a big impact.

If a promoter is torn between booking a few high quality acts, they will undoubtedly book the act that has the best visual identity. If they are drawn in by your imagery to click 'Listen' then so will their audiences, and they can sell tickets.

Visuals and design on your website and socials are often the first impressions you give a potential listener. It should also convey meanings and associations that make up the construction of your overall identity. This means you need to have a hard think about the message you want to convey and how this relates to your music.

In his article on branding, JazzFuel's Matt Fripp lists a few jazz artists who's visual brand is on point, including Brad Mehldau and Bill Laurence (pictured).



## What are your values?

It's important to spend time getting to know your own Values, your own drive of WHY you do what you do. Your authentic character, your human spirit expressed through creativity, attracts other people to you and your art. Your values are what resonates with people.

Music is the primary tool you use to express yourself, but there are also other visual and communication avenues, which is where your online comms tools come in.

Think of it in terms of dating. A good looking, well dressed, well groomed

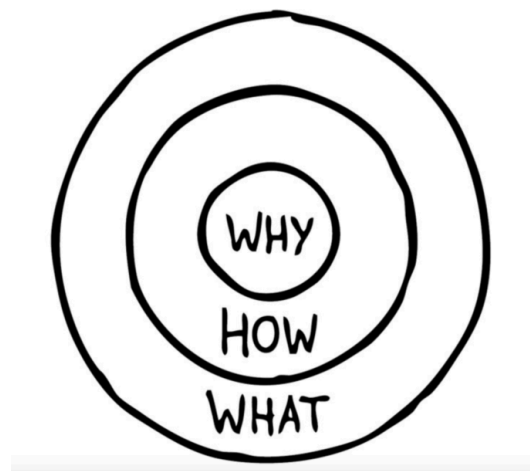
[www.improvisedmusic.ie](http://www.improvisedmusic.ie)

person will grab most people's interest initially (your design and visual branding).

This is the appealing, high quality and consistent visual style across social media, Spotify, Bandcamp and any other online platforms, which you want to be immediately attractive to the eye (to entice people to want to find out more).

But the essence of who you are, your authentic self, is what will keep people interested. That's the authentic voice, not imitation - that is what will connect the real human audiences to you. And it increasingly is also appealing to Bookers/ Media as they understand the wider audience interest in this.

Check out Pieter Schoonderwoerd's article on the 'Golden Circle' business tool for musicians, and spend some time exploring your Why.



## A Review of your Visual Presence Online

### **Do(n't) Be a Stranger**

List out the online platforms where you are active and look at them like a first-time visitor, including your website, Spotify & Bandcamp.

Do they look professional? Are they visually appealing?

But very importantly, do they represent who you are, and where you are as an artist now?

### **PHOTOGRAPHY**

A good photo gets printed in the paper, used in posters, printed in a

season brochure, can lead in a general Gig Guide page. It opens so many doors.

## **Basics of good promo photos**

- Ideally hire a professional camera with professional equipment to create high resolution photos (1MB for online, 5MB for print)
- Make it eye-catching. Find a way to stand out. No more musicians against a brick wall etc.
- The band should be clearly depicted, even if using props, staging, an unusual setting or costumes.
- The photography should reflect the style of the artist - genre, general tone and artistry.

## **A good photo can work for you for a number of years.**

One good photo to go along with an album launch can be the image used for gigs touring that album for a few years. It's an investment.

You may not even need new photos - identify a small selection of your best photos (ideally tied in with latest album artwork) and use them consistently across all platforms.

## **VIDEO**

Make a plan for investing (time, money or both) in video content.

It's an essential part of modern-day branding.

Don't ever share a video where the sound is low quality. It's not worth it. It is actually to your detriment.

Your videos must, as a basic, have good sound quality as a priority, followed by good editing.

If you are approaching programmers, send them a live performance video over an artistic video.

## **WEBSITE**

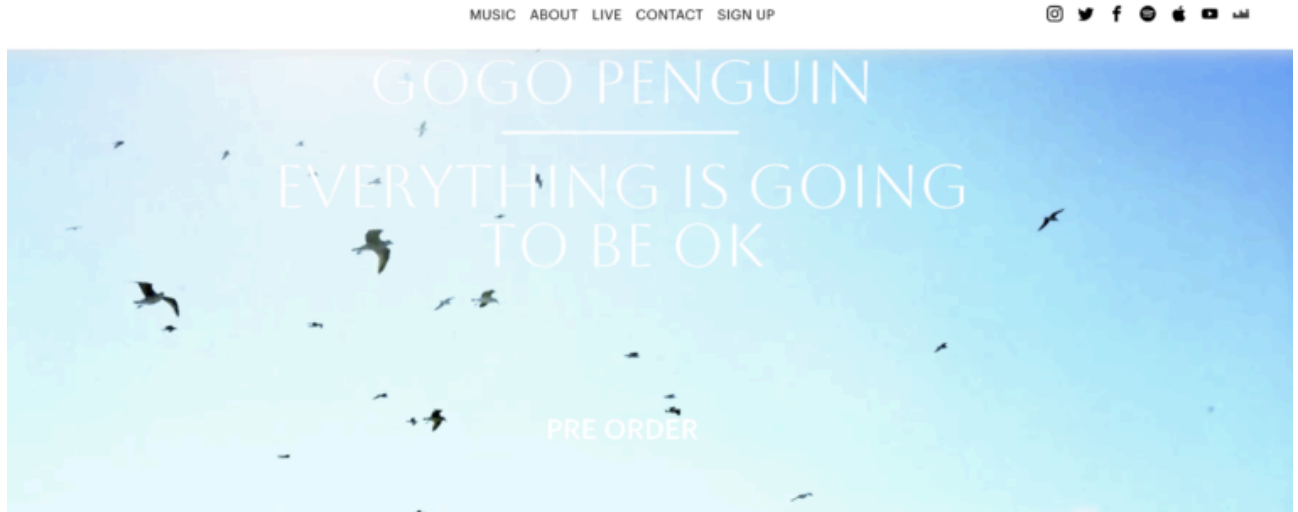
Your Website is your home on the internet. The other channels are places for 'socialising', sharing more minute updates, watching videos etc but you have full control over your website. Pay special attention to your website; it's one of the main first impressions that you show the world and should be clear, professional and keeping with your style.

Social media is very transient, which is what makes it fun and interesting, but important stuff can get easily buried. Therefore your website is the place for the important bits to be front and centre.

[www.improvisedmusic.ie](http://www.improvisedmusic.ie)

The 2 main things your website needs to be are;

- 1) A smooth navigation experience for the user.
- 2) An accurate representation of you and your music, today.



### **Basic Website Content Requirements:**

- Well written, up to date and relevant Bio, which includes at least one and no more than four media/ testimonial quotes.
- Access to some hi-res imagery.
- Access to 2-3 embedded videos, at least one being live performance from no more than 5 years ago. A studio session can work also.
- Contact info - an email address. Social media links should be on every page. A Newsletter sign up list.
- A News or Gigs section for next live performance, release or interesting activity (if you have none, and you are not actively, composing, performing, writing, collaborating or you genuinely have no News, then close the page for now).
- If you are actively gigging, embed Songkick to display up-to-date gig listings.
- Easy place to buy your music (can be a direct link to a Bandcamp page).
- If you have multiple projects, try to be very clear about what they are (also be picky about which are relevant, active or you want to represent you).

**Aim to have:**

- 1) Consistent style (font, sizing, imagery)
- 2) Simple design and navigation (space, straight lines, colour scheme, no excess content)
- 3) Use other platforms (embedding from Bandcamp, Spotify, Youtube, Songkick, etc)

**SOCIAL MEDIA**

Visuals are the primary attraction on social media. A lot of people freeze up about this, as they might be unsure what to 'post'. Planning in advance here can be helpful, and will also help with ensuring that quality and style is consistent.

Ideally half and half of what is 'promo' and what is 'personal'

**The Promo** is reviews, gigs, news updates, releases - don't be afraid to repeat, 'throwback', explore your archive.

**The Personal** includes behind the scenes at a recording session, composing, rehearsing - your process, your approach, inspirations, interests that lead to your music. What might be a 'everyday' for you as a composer or artist, might be fascinating to someone not familiar with the process of music-making.

Collect visuals that speak to you. Your social media can contain photographs you've taken, artwork by you or artists you admire, or other visual content that inspires or feels connected to your music

Even sharing what you're listening to, what is inspiring you this week can be good content - the internet is hungry for personal recommendations - look at the 'Influencer' culture!

What authentically moves or interests you is likely to naturally connect to your music also.

# IMC PRESENTS

[www.improvisedmusic.ie](http://www.improvisedmusic.ie)