



## How to Promote Yourself at a Folk Conference

You'll hear a variety of opinions about what to use for conference promotion, so keep that in mind as you plan your strategy and materials. Much like any other type of music promotion, some of this will depend on your market, your personal brand etc.

That being said, here are some basic considerations for a folk music conference, such as Folk Alliance, NERFA etc.

### **Audio - mix of hard copy (cd) and digital (QR link)**

At Folk Alliance, there is often a Folk DJ event where you can meet DJs who will play your music on the radio. Many of them still like a 'one-sheet' and a hard copy of a CD. Others want a link to MP3s. So be ready for a few scenarios!

[For folk DJs](#) (learn more at this link), keep in mind that they are most amenable to playing recordings that have clear track listings, composer credit, and track timing (they do not have the time to put your CD into a player to find out how long xyz track might be, they will simply play someone else - you can find out more about their preferences here: [learn more about this from Art Menius here](#)). If your CDs don't already have the track info easily visible, print up a 'one-sheet' (see Art Menius' [advice on one-sheets](#)), fold it in 4, and hand it out with every CD. Put your contact info on the CD somewhere, if it isn't already, in case the hand out and the CD get separated. A folk DJ will notice that you've gone to the effort to make their lives easier and for that reason alone, you will have made a good impression.

Always, ALWAYS ask for someone's contact info when giving them your music. Take a photo of their conference badge if they don't have a business card. It's a common "exchange" and it is not overstepping to ask for this. This allows you to follow-up after the event, keep good records and helps with grant completion reports.

### **Postcards, and/or business cards with strong graphics**

There are a few ways to do this...but no matter what people say, having a paper hand-out is still key to networking, along with a jpeg of your material to text or airdrop to someone. And using a photo of yourself can often help accelerate networking and recognition.

One option for this is to print business cards specific to the event. You can also do postcards but...they are harder to put in a pocket and since the business card is such a common handout, people unconsciously hold onto them more, and sometimes take them home to learn more about you after the event.

if you don't already have some of these, print a whack of blank ones, and use mailing labels to print your showcase times on the back (that way you can re-use leftover blank cards). Use the biggest font, and the biggest label, you can for the particular piece you are using (i.e. biz card may not have same label size as postcard/poster). Consider leaving some blank space somewhere, in case someone wants to write on the card. Scatter the



cards here and there in the hotel. The cards (particularly the biz cards) are also invaluable when you meet someone and they ask when you are performing. It's way easier to get someone to take a small card (the business cards fit in some delegate badges, where people often store their own business cards - postcards don't), rather than give them a cd or a one-sheet. And, even if they don't make it to your showcase, the card serves as a reminder for them to look you up after the conference. Not everyone does, but I often find that when I go through the stack of promo from a conference, I will often find a card or two from someone that I might otherwise have forgotten and I will look them up to hear their music.

### **Posters (Letter or legal)**

*NOTE: FAI prohibits the use of posters by artists \*except\* in showcase rooms - MusicNL will take 2 copies of your poster and hang it in our showcase room, and sometimes artists poster the stairwell near showcase rooms, and FAI turns a blind eye. This poster game changes every year, best prepare some to have on hand either way)*

Use the same graphic look as your cards: Print 20-30 of these, try to have something (a quote, a description) that gives an idea of who you are/what you do. Try to hang your posters the instant you get to the hotel (send one person to check-in desk, the others to poster/postcard, if you are not staying at the conference hotel, make a special trip, put them up on the first day of the conference, to the best of your ability). Only use painters tape (not dollar store, the real stuff) or the hotel and the conference leadership team will be upset with you. Think outside the box, particularly if most of the obvious spots are already full, but be sensible and be respectful of the hotel property. Bathroom stalls, staircase between private showcase floors (where people will travel to avoid the elevators). Be 'guerilla' but be smart, try to hang against painted surfaces, and avoid hanging on anything delicate (at one conference, an artist their posters on a gold leaf mirror frame, the tape they used damaged the gold leaf and the conference organization had to pay hundreds of dollars for a replacement mirror – all the private showcase presenters were billed a portion of this cost. Said artist was never forgotten.) If you are new to the event and just getting your name out there will help a lot. These posters will help a lot. Look at the conference's official showcase schedule; figure out where major events will take place and poster using that information (ie official showcases are on the 2nd floor -the closest washrooms would be ideal - and other places where people stand and wait i.e. atm, elevator).

Fair warning: this is a tricky thing to do, the rules change each year, with each hotel property. Check in advance with conference management office so you know what is permitted and what is not. At the very least, you will find some decent spots. And put a poster on the door of whatever hotel room you are staying in (assuming it's at the host hotel). And, be sure to take everything down when you leave.

Try to keep a clean, unified look on all your printed material - repeat the same image, same/similar graphics. THIS IS YOUR BRAND. This makes you easily recognizable, from one-sheet to biz card. I have included a pic of some stuff I put together from my time in management I know to give you an idea of the array of poster, postcard biz card etc.



## Busking/spontaneous performance

*Again, this may NOT be suitable for every conference, at FAI it's a tricky thing to do*

A pop-up performance of 2-3 songs is FREE to you, and when used correctly, it can be one of the best promotional tools available to you. Firstly, be respectful and NEVER do this near a panel or showcase performance where you will cause sound disturbance to something else going on. Be sure that you have cards nearby (or a sign) so that people know who you are as they walk by. If you're really on top of your game, make sure your small sign has a couple of performance times.

Think of holding these performances at moments when people are moving from one place to another en masse (dinner hour, times between panels etc). The lobby (near the front desk) is usually a good spot for this. Outside the front doors, if it's a nice day. Be sure to make it quick (20 mins max) and move on.

## Be Ready to Network

Have an answer to the question "What type of music do you play?" Make sure it's simple, quick and easy. And that you feel comfortable saying it, and that your bandmates feel comfortable with it too (if they don't teach them how to). Some artists get hung up on long descriptions ("Well, it's like indie-folk-punk with post-modern jazz influences, and urban hip-hop stylings..."). Make it short, simple and easy to convey. Don't worry if it doesn't capture the entirety of every song you perform. The description you will use in conversation is not a permanent tattoo on your art - it just helps someone situate you within the broad spectrum of folk music.



Use your influences as a reference if you need (“I sound like Carole King steeped in acoustic blues”). Or ask someone you know and trust to help you come up with a quick description. As much as possible, make sure you and your bandmates have your most outgoing selves at the ready. Split up if there are many of you. Divide and network. Jam with other musicians. Strike up spontaneous conversations; get to know people as people as people first. The business will follow naturally.

Never been to a folk conference? Check out this video. You can glean a lot about lobby performances, jams, private showcase hallways (aka bedroom showcases) elevator postering, and the whole vibe of the event in general: <http://vimeo.com/50848750>

### **Self-care**

Getting all of this done in advance is not easy, and then juggling meetings, performances, networking and showcasing on-site is a huge challenge. During the conference, you will have little time to eat, sleep and take care of yourself. Get some food for your room, think in advance of how you’re going to tackle the event. Have a band strategy of who will attend which event, make a schedule, use your electronic calendar to schedule reminders (put phone on silent though!).

Bring everything you might need when you get there (posters, strings, hummus, instant coffee - whatever). Assume that there will be no spare time to leave the hotel for errands. It is not a bad idea to make up a schedule (and to-do list) in advance so you know when you might have time to eat, sleep, rehearse, chill out. It took me many years of running ragged to realize that it’s so important to take care of oneself at these things, and even with more care for oneself, it’s a crazy marathon. Find the events that have food included, and make sure you eat, assuming it is food that works for you. Conferences often have some breakfast offerings included for free – get up early and get to them. You’ll be well fed and meet more people.

Best of luck!