

Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

With Musical Model, Arts May Avoid Strip Mall

Diane Ragsdale · Thursday, August 25th, 2011

This past week I came across a New York Times [article](#) featured on ArtsJournal examining the remarkable success of the indie Jazz label, Pi. The article demonstrates that Pi is bucking trends in the music industry. It is managing to not just keep its head above water at a time when many music labels are struggling, but it is having tremendous impact despite being a relatively small Jazz label focused on the leading edge of its artform.

Here are a few keys to Pi's success (which I gleaned from the article):

(1) Unlike many labels that flood the market with product (often as a hedge against the uncertainty of not knowing which will succeed or not), Pi releases a handful of albums per year and is highly selective in choosing which artists to get behind. Virtually everything it releases meets with critical acclaim. Because it has earned a reputation for consistently putting out great albums and has a very clear niche, it has a devoted (and growing) fan base.

(2) Given its limited release schedule, and the limited revenue potential of each of its releases (these are not mainstream artists), Pi keeps its overhead low. Its owners are pragmatic and disciplined. By staying small they have been able to maintain artistic integrity.

(3) Pi has a long courtship with an artist before it makes a commitment. Once in, however, Pi invests deeply in the development of its artists and ensures that each receives sufficient resources, attention, and support from the label. This is a critical factor in the label's remarkable track record and reputation.

Pi's strategies are serving both its artists and its customers.

Given an overabundance of product and seats to fill on any given night in many communities (relative to current 'demand') and (sorry to say) the not-quite-ready-for-primetime-quality of much the so-called 'professional' work that is produced and presented in the US, it's worth considering the lessons of Pi (which are not new, of course)....

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