

# JOB STRATEGIES

## IN THE MUSIC BUSINESS: THE CASE FOR

# INTERNSHIPS

**The Hours Are Long and the Work is Hard,  
but for a Fortunate Few the Rewards Can Be Great**

by Clyde Philip Rolston and David Herrera



**T**he recorded music industry is a \$38 billion industry worldwide. Sales of prerecorded CDs, cassettes, and other media approached \$14.6 billion in the United States alone in 2000.<sup>1</sup> Increasingly, higher education is playing a role in providing skilled, entry-level employees to the industry. The Music and Entertainment Industry Educators Association *Guide to Music Business Programs 1998* recognizes 33 four-year programs offering degrees in music business. Another 40 institutions offer “limited courses” in music business.<sup>2</sup>

Virtually every four-year program offers its students an opportunity to intern in the industry. The National Association of Music Merchants (NAMM) requires its educational affiliates to place all of their students in a three credit hour internship. While most of these programs are housed in schools of music, they all require courses in the school of business and many offer specialized courses on the business of music. Students typically receive a degree in music, mass communications, or business. While interning, these students

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**Table 1: Effectiveness of Job-Seeking Strategies**

| Strategy            | N   | Mean | Standard Deviation |
|---------------------|-----|------|--------------------|
| Temporary Services  | 155 | 5.03 | 2.71               |
| Unsolicited Resumes | 156 | 3.90 | 2.52               |
| Cold Calling        | 155 | 4.85 | 2.59               |
| Interning           | 156 | 7.47 | 2.20               |
| Networking          | 157 | 5.65 | 2.44               |
| Classified Ads      | 147 | 5.62 | 2.47               |



are not working as performers, but as managers, marketers, accountants, and audio engineers. Internships consist of on-the-job training of 15 to 40 hours per week or more by one or more professionals. The intern's school provides additional supervision and oversight by a faculty or staff person and may require one or more papers related to the experience.

Today's entry-level applicant in the entertainment industry is more likely to have a college degree than ever before. In most cases, however, an education is not enough. Experience is required, and most applicants get that experience through a college-sponsored internship. A major aspect of student internships, especially in the music industry where contacts are paramount, is the development of pathways to entry-level positions. It is a commonly held belief in the music business and in music business education that internships are not only important to obtaining entry-level positions, but essential.

The purpose of the survey reported here was to explore the perceptions and methodologies of various job-seeking strategies. It is expected that respondents would rate the importance of serving internships high for both their personal experience and in general. It is additionally expected that respondents will report that interns are used in the place of full-time employees.

### Survey Says!

Respondents surveyed were a national sample of those currently working in the music industry. Questionnaires were mailed to 800 people chosen randomly from the 7,000 listings in the *1999 Industry Sourcebook*. Respondents were voluntary rather than totally random.<sup>3</sup>

### The Importance of Educational Internships

Internships are the main vehicle for development of both work skills and contact development for university students seeking to enter the music industry. The strength of internships in the music industry has been considered indispensable for access to professional careers. Dr. Eugene D. Schmiel, Director of the Academic Programs Institute for Experiential Learning, writes, "Internships serve as a bridge between the college/university and work, not only for the career itself, but also for learning the different behaviors, roles, skills, and even expectations of the working world."<sup>4</sup> Additionally, internships are a vehicle that leads to employment and allows students to gain the work experience required to gain an advantage when job-hunting

for lower-level positions.

John Pearce, reporting in the *Academy of Management Executives*, states that linking the classroom to business practices was one of six core issues identified by business faculty and professionals as most contentious.<sup>5</sup> Contentiousness lies in the difficulty in merging applications with broader theoretical issues in subject matter. One method linking the theoretical with hands-on training in the classroom is the practice of business internships.

### Methodologies for Seeking Entry-Level Positions

Most industry entry-level positions require a low-level skill set such as data processing, data entry, phone skills, and other entry-level office administrative tasks. Better college students already have all the skills necessary to perform these kinds of tasks. Beyond these basic skills, simple knowledge of the position may be all that is needed for consideration; therefore interns and temporary employees should have an advantage in filling these entry-level jobs.

Respondents were asked to rate the effectiveness of various methodologies for seeking an entry-level position in the music industry. Six strategies were rated: (1) working in a temporary personnel service; (2) mailing out unsolicited resumes to the industry; (3) personally "cold calling" on businesses; (4) interning; (5) networking from full-time industry positions; and (6) responding to classified ads. Choices were rated from one to 10, with 10 being "very important" and one representing "not important." Results are shown in Table 1 on page 24. Internships were weighted highest with a mean of 7.47, followed by "networking" (5.65), "responding to classified advertisements" (5.62), and "temporary work" (5.03) or temporary personnel services.

The result of the survey supports the current mindset of industry and education professionals — internships are the best method for obtaining entry-level positions. A study by Stephen Knouse, John Tanner, and Elizabeth Harris (which controlled for student's potential using ACT scores) found that business students who interned achieve higher GPAs at graduation than those who did not. Additionally, the same study shows that those students who did not intern were more likely to be unemployed at graduation (64 percent versus 36 percent) than those who participated in business internships. While this advantage disappears at six months, its value can not be overstated.<sup>6</sup> It is reasonable to assume that those students who had jobs at graduation enjoyed a higher first-year income,

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if not a higher salary, and those students who were not employed at graduation had fewer job choices.

Behind interning, networking, responding to classified advertisements, and working in temporary personnel services are considered about equally as effective as job search strategies. Networking can entail attendance at industry functions, showcases, writers' nights, and other events. It can also be accomplished by entry into related industries such as finance, banking, sales, retail, marketing, public relations, or other subsidiary businesses that are related to the music industry. Simply living in a city with a high concentration of music-related businesses may allow interaction with industry employees in one's normal, day-to-day activities.

"Temping," like interning, gives employees an inside advantage on permanent job leads.

Temporary job placement

services are frequently used as cost reductions for the workforce. Known as "full-time temp" employees, temporary workers are used for short- and long-term projects. Many times, workers that are both efficient and fit into the corporate culture are hired as openings appear in the workplace. SONY in New York runs its own temporary service, sometimes using employees

for months with no benefits and no guarantees before granting them full-time employee status.

There is a growing use of online classified advertising in the music industry. Where most job leads were previously known only through

tight circles of close business and personal relationships, now the Internet is bringing a new level to information dissemination. Job sites such as <http://schlbus.belmont.edu/mb/Jobs/index.html>, [www.employnow.com/jobpost.htm](http://www.employnow.com/jobpost.htm), [www.billboard-online.com/classifieds](http://www.billboard-online.com/classifieds), and [www.showbizjobs.com](http://www.showbizjobs.com) are increasingly used for job postings in the entertainment industry, especially the film area. However, the use of print classified advertising is still relatively rare in the major music markets, even for entry-level positions. The relatively strong score reported here might reflect more frequent use of classifieds in smaller geographic markets, away from the mainstream markets (Los Angeles, New York, Nashville, Miami) and the increasing use of Internet classified advertising.

### Times They Are A-Changing

Internships were not always considered the best way to land a job in the industry. When

asked the categorical importance of obtaining *their* first entry-level position, respondents rated internships fairly low. Results are shown in Table 2 below. It is important to note that this question asks respondents to report on *their* personal experience in obtaining *their* first entry-level position and not the current effectiveness of these categories. Interestingly, respondents rated

internships dead last. An investigation of the "other" response reveals answers ranging from "persistence," "schmoozing," "drive/ambition" and "desire." More than 51 percent of all "other" responses can be grouped into the cate-

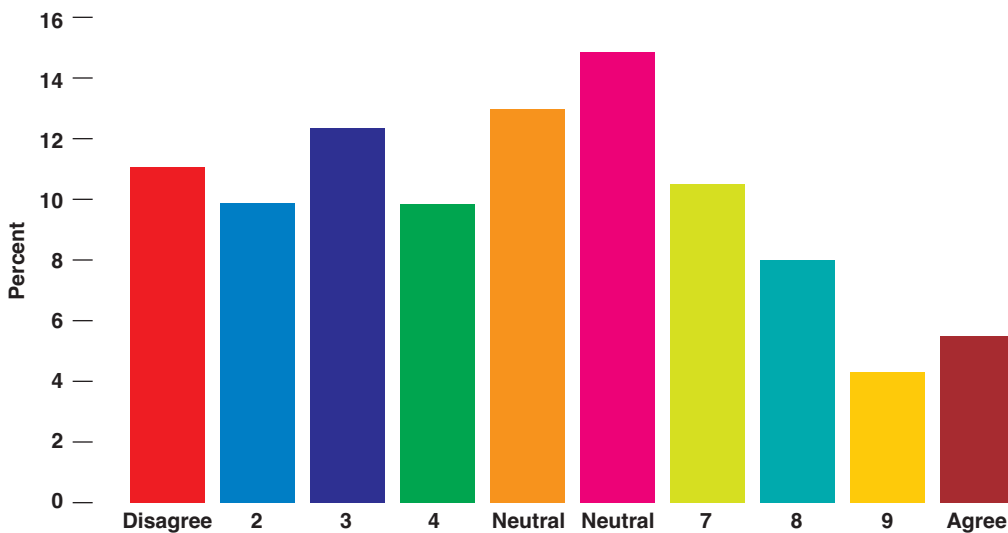


**Survey results support the current mindset of industry and education professionals—internships are the best method for obtaining entry-level positions.**

**Table 2. "How important were the following categories in obtaining your first entry-level position in the music industry?"**

| Ratings                  | Mean | Standard Deviation |
|--------------------------|------|--------------------|
| 1. Other                 | 8.88 | 2.43               |
| 2. Contact relationships | 8.17 | 2.60               |
| 3. Self Study            | 8.06 | 2.37               |
| 4. Luck                  | 7.82 | 2.38               |
| 5. College Education     | 5.46 | 3.10               |
| 6. Internships           | 4.94 | 3.27               |

**Figure 1. Interns Diminish Entry Level Positions**



**A hotly debated topic is whether internships serve as an opportunity for students or as a barrier to entry-level jobs for graduates.**

gory of “persistence and hard work.”

The relatively low scores for internships are contrary to what the researchers expected, but again it is important to note that respondents are asked about *their personal* experience in obtaining employment, and not what method is currently effective. The respondents in this survey have worked an average of 18.26 years in the music industry, with both a mode and median of 20 years, and only 33 percent responded “yes” when asked if *they* had participated in an internship program. These are successful professionals who entered the industry at a time when the industry and its career path were very different than they are today. In the early days of “rock and roll,” the industry was more open to young entrepreneurs who, with little education and a lot of luck, could become a major force in the industry, if just for a short time. Now the industry is dominated by five entertainment conglomerates (BMG, AOL/Time Warner, Vivendi Universal, SONY, and EMI) that increasingly value experience and education.<sup>7</sup>

Contacts and relationships are more important today than ever for *getting* a job in the music industry, and internships have become the best way to make those contacts. Once there, however, the internship experience is the opportunity to demonstrate what you know and your work ethic and potentially convert an internship into a permanent position.

### **Student Internships versus Entry Level Positions**

A hotly debated topic in most music industry cities is whether internships serve as an opportunity for students or as a barrier to entry-level jobs for graduates. Interns and recent graduates

often feel that their free labor is being used in lieu of paid positions. Industry managers have been known to say “why pay for something when you can get it free?” and in the same breath deny that interns are used instead of paid employees.

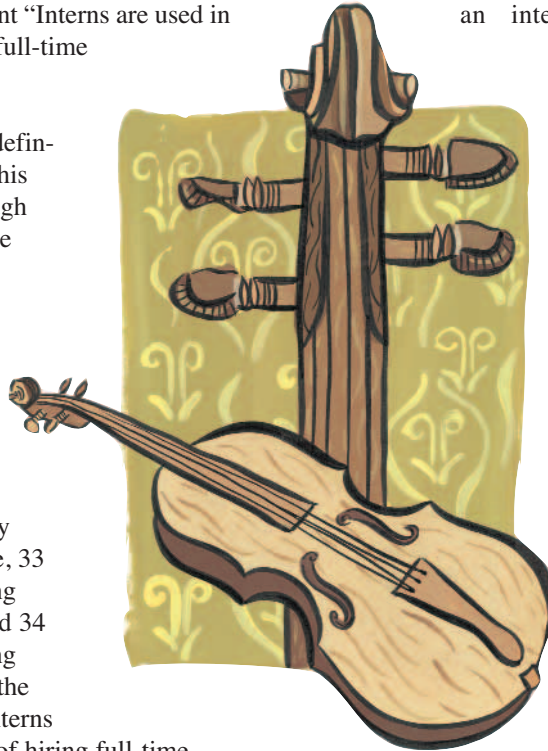
The researchers wanted to know how the industry would respond, in an anonymous survey, to the questions of whether (1) “the use of student internships diminishes the opportunity for entry-level positions” and (2) “interns are used in lieu of hiring full-time employees.” On a rating scale of one to 10, with 10 meaning “I agree” and one meaning “I disagree,” the use of student internships diminishing the opportunity for entry-level positions scored a mean average of 4.96. This may be categorized as a fairly neutral rating. However, the standard deviation of 2.59 indicates a substantial spread within the responses.

Thirty-two percent of respondents lean toward disagreement, and approximately 20 percent of respondents seem to feel that internships do indeed diminish entry-level opportunities. It is difficult to understand how the respondents believe interns are *not* used in place of full-time employees. Perhaps most respondents were from relatively small businesses that can benefit from a part-time intern but cannot support an employee doing the same job on a full-time basis. Another possibility is that the respondents did not believe that an intern would have the skills required to fill the role of the full-time employee. By contrast, a major label or publisher may have dozens of interns at any given time, many of whom have years of part-time experience from internships and are cumulatively doing the same job as a full-time employee. Anecdotally, the researchers are

aware of several instances of businesses using full-time, unpaid interns in violation of the Fair Labor Standards Act. This practice is illegal and opens participating businesses to the possibility of fines and lawsuits. This practice is more the exception than the norm; however, it does indicate the possibility that internship labor is being used in place of full-time, paid employees.

The question of the impact of interns on entry-level positions was posed a second time with slightly different wording. Respondents were asked to agree or disagree with the statement “Interns are used in lieu of hiring full-time employees.”

Again, there seems to be no definitive answer to this question. Although the mean average (5.59) reflects a fairly neutral response (Figure 1, page 27), the actual data peak in two distinct camps split fairly down the middle, 33 percent indicating disagreement and 34 percent indicating agreement with the statement that interns are used in lieu of hiring full-time employee.



**As long as internships are perceived as the best way into the job market, the music industry will take advantage of the free labor.**

### Conclusions

The hours are long and the work is hard, but for a fortunate few the rewards can be great. As with any job, the best employees in the recording industry rise to the top and are rewarded with high incomes, perks, and recognition that few other industries offer.

As long as internships are perceived as the best way into the job market, the music industry will take advantage of the free labor. Whether this leads to a decrease in the number of entry-level positions, particularly at the larger music companies, will continue to be the subject of debate. The results reported here indicate that the importance of internships to obtaining entry-level positions will continue to increase. Until recently, higher education has been the industry’s willing accomplice, supplying, in fact encouraging, more and more eager young people to intern. More recently that trends seems to

be reversing somewhat. One sign that educators are slowing down the supply of unpaid interns is the recent move by several universities to allow only upperclassmen to intern.

Educators have the difficult task of convincing their students to maintain the appropriate balance between class work and internships. On the one hand, students are told that internships are “your ticket into the industry.” On the other hand, students must finish required course work in order to graduate, and individual instructors may be unsympathetic to the conflicting demands of interning. The students may be torn between satisfying the demands of an internship and the academic demands of the university.

Students understand that their performance during the internship and the level of commitment perceived by their mentors may mean the difference between being hired on a permanent basis or being replaced by another intern. Keeping students interested in classes that seem less relevant than their internship is an increasing challenge for academicians. ■

*Clyde Rolston is an associate professor and David Herrera is an instructor of music business at Belmont University’s Mike Curb School of Business.*

### Notes

1. RIAA Reports on U.S. Recorded Music Shipments [www.riaa.org/MD-US-3.cfm](http://www.riaa.org/MD-US-3.cfm) retrieved from the World Wide Web December 17, 2001.
2. *The Recording Industry Sourcebook: A Reference Guide to Industry Contacts*. Ninth Edition, Cardinal Business Media, Emeryville, CA.
3. For more detailed information on the research methods and results, see *The Journal of Arts Management Law and Society*, Volume 30 No. 2 (Summer) 2000, p. 102-112.
4. Schmiel, Eugene D. “Why Do Students Need an Internship?” (About.com: <http://www.collegeview.com/careers/whyintern.html>)
5. Pearce II, John A. Faculty survey on business education reform. *The Academy of Management Executive*, May 1999, 13:2 (p. 105-109).
6. Knouse, Stephen, Tanner, John, and Elizabeth Harris. “The Relation of College Internships, Performance, and Subsequent Job Opportunity,” *The Journal of Employment Counseling*, March 1999, 36:1 (p. 35-43).
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