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The Tech Beat

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Innovations, trends, and dustups in the world of tech

Getting Up Close And Personal With Your Favorite Artist



Olga Kharif

In the past, we thought of, say Madonna, Eminem and Duran Duran as our untouchable idols (Ok, so maybe you don't like M&M, but stay with me for a minute). We could see them, from afar, at concerts. We could read their online diaries. We could write them fan letters -- knowing full well that we'd never hear back. Chances are, though, fans will feel closer to their favorite artists in the coming months, thanks to companies like **Mobiqa and ArtistShare.net**.

Both Mobiqa and ArtistShare.net have proven beyond a shadow of a doubt that being more approachable pays, and pays big. Here's an example: A few years ago, singer Maria Schneider was a nobody. Really. She had a fan base of about 200 people, no record deal, and she rarely performed, says Brian Camelio, ArtistShare.net's owner and an ex-professional guitar player who created the site after getting sick of touring.

So, Schneider joined ArtistShare.net, allowing fans to be intricately involved into an artist's creative process. Fans can buy a credit on an artist's CD. They can sign up for online music lessons with their favorite star. They can pay to participate in Q&As with artists -- knowing that their money will finance those artists' recording sessions. In fact, fans helped Schneider release her CD, "Concert in the Garden", which recently won her a **Grammy**.

Because she is seen as approachable and available to fans, Schneider's fan base now exceeds 10,000. Fan bases of about 29 other artists using the site are growing like weeds. Indeed, Camelio says, he gets about 30 inquiries a day from artists wanting to join his site, which charges commission for facilitating this artist-to-fan interaction.

Then, there's Mobiga. This company's technology allows artists to send short text messages, announcing their upcoming concerts, or offering barcodes with discounts on their new CDs, to the fans' mobile phones. This service, available in Europe, should come to the U.S. in three to four months, says Greg Wilfahrt, co-founder of SMS.ac, the world's largest community for SMS users.

All that should make us fans rejoice. Of course, chances are, our idols will still not respond to our letters...