



# THE HIT FACTORY

Who needs major labels, marketing, or airplay? A social networking site is getting more hits than Google – and turning invisible bands into mini entertainment networks. How MySpace became the MTV for the Net generation.



by Jeff Howe

Hawthorne Heights – from left, Casey Calvert, J.T. Woodruff, Matt Ridenour, Eron Bucciarelli, and Micah Carli – is big on MySpace. The band has sold half a million albums.

CHRIS KOFFER/KUOW/GETTY

# The members of Hawthorne Heights have no business being rock stars. They play a strain of punk that has consigned innumerable bands to the obscurity of dive bars and pirate radio. For the past three decades, a devotion to this stripped-down, anticommercial

music has meant never quitting your day job.

And yet here they are on a dusty summer day in Pomona, California, playing for thousands of adoring fans. Hawthorne Heights is a big draw at this year's Warped Tour, a movable punk feast featuring more than 300 bands on 48 North American stops. The kids in the audience - a multiracial mix of teens from across Southern California - appear transported, pushing toward the front of the stage where slam dancers crash against each other like pinballs. Those in the front rows chant the lyrics with red-faced intensity. They've memorized the entire set.

Hawthorne Heights is touring the country in a plush bus. The quintet's debut album, *The Silence in Black and White*, has sold more than 500,000 copies since its release last year, and the group has appeared on ABC's *Jimmy Kimmel Live* and been on MTV's *TRL*. The five young men from Dayton, Ohio, are living the rock-and-roll dream - but they took a highly unconventional path to get there. The band achieved its popularity without any real radio or TV airplay, a feat unheard-of a few years ago. They aren't signed to a major label, and they don't want to be. They don't need industrial-strength marketing campaigns or heavy rotation.

What they have is MySpace, a community Web site that converts electronic word of mouth into the hottest marketing strategy since the advent of MTV. Massively popular, MySpace is nominally a social networking site like Friendster, but nearly 400,000 of the site's roughly 30 million user pages belong to bands. The rest belong mostly to teens

and twentysomethings who attend the groups' shows, download their songs, read their blogs, send them fan mail, and enthusiastically spread the word.

As it happens, the man behind this phenomenon is working his way through the Warped Tour crowd like a rock star himself. Everyone seems to know Tom Anderson. A laid-back 29-year-old in a plaid shirt and baseball hat, he can hardly take three paces before he's asked to autograph a shoe, a T-shirt, or in one case a naked back. No wonder: His photo shows up at the top of every MySpace user's "friends" list. As the first friend of every MySpace member, Anderson may be one of the most popular humans on the planet.

And in the entertainment universe that MySpace is helping to create, friends count. "This generation is growing up without having ever watched programmed media," says Courtney Holt, head of new media and strategic marketing at Interscope, one of the first labels to embrace MySpace. "They don't think in terms of the album, and they don't think in terms of a TV schedule. They think in terms of TiVo, P2P, AOL, and of course MySpace. We're just going to have to adapt."

By any measure, MySpace is one of the top sites on the Web. It racked up 9.4 billion pageviews in August - more than Google - and new users are signing up at a stunning rate of 3.5 million a month. But these aren't the only numbers that drew the attention of Rupert Murdoch, chair and CEO of News Corp., which agreed to buy MySpace's parent company in July for \$580 million: The site

hosts 12 percent of all ads on the Web, more than any other site. MySpace should gross \$30 million to \$40 million this year, says John Tinker, an analyst with ThinkEquity in New York. And with News Corp.'s sales force behind it, he estimates the company could double that figure in 2006.

To focus on corporate finances, though, is to miss a larger point. The real economic beneficiaries of MySpace are the ambitious young musicians in Pomona and around the country who are creating a new, life-size kind of stardom. Over the past couple years, MySpace and other community sites, like purevolume.com, have launched a number of acts: Fall Out Boy, My Chemical Romance, Relient K, and Silverstein, among others. Relient K, which plays earnest pop punk with an understated Christian message, has sold more than 500,000 albums in 12 months. My Chemical Romance's last album sold more than 1 million copies.

These artists have discovered what could be the first serious business model for music in the post-Napster era. The old way of doing things, which counted on a few blockbusters to finance dozens of expensive failures, is yielding little besides a decline in major label revenue. By contrast, "MySpace bands," as the site's publicist refers to them, keep production and promotion costs as low as possible. They give away their best two or three songs as downloads or streams and use social networking and email blasts to reach

*Contributing editor Jeff Howe (jeff\_howe@wiredmag.com) wrote about art provocateur Banksy in issue 13.08.*



an audience hungry for new music. Converts become zealots, more than making up for any lost CD revenue through sales of concert tickets, T-shirts, messenger bags, hoodies, posters, and bumper stickers. With little fanfare, these groups are creating a new middle class of popular music: acts that can make a full-time living selling only a modest number of discs, on the order of 50,000 to 500,000 per release.

For this generation of musicians, the mass market and the hit-making apparatus it sup-

ports are relics of a bygone age. The new reality is that their audience isn't listening to radio or vegging out in front of MTV. The audience is online.



Tom Anderson wasn't much interested in the Web when he graduated from UC Berkeley in 1997 with a double major in English and rhetoric. He moved to San Francisco and started an alternative rock band called

MySpace founders Chris DeWolfe and Tom Anderson are helping to create a new middle class for bands - not too big, not too small.

Swank. It barely lasted a year, and hardly anyone noticed when it broke up. Still, the experience left a deep mark on Anderson. There was a stark division between rock haves and have-nots. Bands were either on magazine covers and all over the radio or completely invisible. "I saw how hard it was for even really talented bands to reach an audience," he says. At the time he was standing right in the middle of the dotcom boom. Like a lot of people, he thought the Internet could change the way bands connected with their fans. "I just didn't know how," he says.

But Anderson's interests extended beyond the Internet or music. After a long trip to Taiwan, he returned to California in 1999 to pick up a master's in film studies at UCLA. During his first week at school, he was in the computer lab checking his class schedule when he saw an ad for Matchmaker.com. "I logged on to find a girl," he says. "But I wound up being more intrigued by the idea that people could connect over the Net for all kinds of reasons."

Anderson finished the two-year UCLA program in a year. After graduating, he intended to return to Asia. But first he needed money. Walking through his Los Angeles neighborhood one day, he saw a flyer promising \$20 to anyone who answered the ad. A week later, he showed up at a nondescript office building in Santa Monica for what turned out to be a one-on-one focus group. The interviewer, who worked for an online storage startup called Xdrive Technologies, was so impressed with her subject that she hired him as a copywriter. Anderson figured he'd be at Xdrive for three weeks, just long enough to earn plane fare to Singapore.

It didn't work out that way. Anderson hit

it off with Chris DeWolfe, Xdrive's VP of sales and marketing. "Tom was so obviously full of smart ideas, I wanted to work more closely with him," says DeWolfe, now CEO of MySpace. By mid-2001, the two had left Xdrive to form their own marketing company, Response Base Marketing. The next year, they sold the business to eUniverse for \$3.3 million. They continued to run the company, but they were already looking for a new challenge.

In the spring of 2003, Anderson started thinking about online connections again, particularly social networking sites. He believed that services like Friendster, which was just beginning to catch on, were stifling creativity when they could be encouraging it. Users' homepages all looked alike; Anderson imagined something much more fluid and customizable. He also realized that social networking needed to accommodate groups as well as individuals - teams looking for players, professionals looking for work, filmmakers looking for a crew, bands looking for an audience.

Finally, Anderson decided to broach the subject with DeWolfe. He barged into his office: "Dude, we've got to talk. I've been thinking about Friendster."



For Eron Bucciarelli, the earnest, mop-headed drummer of Hawthorne Heights, a degree in communications from Ohio's University of Dayton seemed like a dead end. His heart was in punk rock: first grunge, then hardcore and death metal. In 2001, he took a job with the local cable company and joined an unsigned pop punk quintet called A Day in the Life, after the Beatles song of the same name. The members devoted themselves to

the band, playing at every opportunity. It was grueling: lousy venues, seedy hotels, and long road trips.

"We went on tour every weekend," Bucciarelli explains. "We'd pack up the van right after work on Friday, play a show that night in Pittsburgh, play the next night in Philly, wind up in Delaware somewhere on Sunday, and then drive all night to get back to Dayton by Monday morning."

Before long, the punishing regime of day jobs and weekend tours took its toll. A brief flirtation with the indie label Drive-Thru Records fizzled. The band's lead singer, J. T. Woodruff, was disenchanted and exhausted; he had two jobs and attended night school. When the bassist quit, the other members were ready to follow his lead.

But Bucciarelli wouldn't let go. He convinced his bandmates to hire another bass player, and they continued under a new name: Hawthorne Heights. "We used to tell people it was because we liked Nathaniel Hawthorne," he laughs, "but that's bullshit. We just thought it sounded cool."

The band decided to reinvent itself along more commercially viable lines. "We agreed this would be our last shot," he says. "We didn't want to be in our late 20s playing some Elks hall. We'd be geezers." The first element in need of overhaul, they decided, was the music. A Day in the Life played pop punk built on catchy guitar riffs. "We dropped the classic rock influence and added breakdowns and screaming," he says. It pushed their sound closer to the post-punk genre known as screamo.

Bucciarelli saw the potential of online communities to build an audience for the new band. "I knew that Web sites like purevolume.com, which had just started, would be better than radio at introducing us to the kind of people who might listen to our music." He took the band into a jerry-built studio and recorded a two-song demo. When he posted the tracks on purevolume.com, they got thousands of downloads before Hawthorne Heights had even played in front of a live audience. Then, following advice from Getsigned.com, Bucciarelli started pitching labels with their new sound.

It wasn't clear that his hard work would pay off. Drive-Thru didn't like the new direction. A few other companies asked them to come out to California to play a showcase, but they couldn't afford the trip. Victory Records, a thriving indie label known for

**Suddenly the band had a direct marketing list of more than 200,000 - every one a die-hard fan.**

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**Hawthorne Heights**  
Emo / Post Hardcore / Pop Punk



**"Hawthorne Heights"**  
Dayton, Ohio  
United States  
Profile Views: 319327  
Last Login: 9/14/2005

View more pics

Contacting Hawthorne Heights

- Send Message
- Forward to Friend
- Add to Friends
- Add to Favorites
- Instant Message
- Block User
- Add to Group
- Rank User

MySpace URL:  
<http://www.myspace.com/hawthorneheights>

Hawthorneheights General Info	
Member Since	1/18/2004
Band Website	<a href="http://hawthorneheights.com">hawthorneheights.com</a>
Band Members	Eron Baccardi- drums Casey Calvert- guitar Nick Carl- guitar Matt Ridanour- bass JT Woodruff- vocals/guitar
Influences	Too many to mention
Record Label	Victory Records
Type of Label	Indie

Total Plays: 1712694 Downloads Today: 57 Plays Today: 1892

**Ohio is For Lovers** Plays: 1261237  
Download | Rate | Comments | Lyrics | Add

**Niki FM** Plays: 246772  
Download | Rate | Comments | Lyrics | Add

**Ohio Is For Lovers** Plays: 24021  
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**Silver Bullet** Plays: 180664  
Download | Rate | Comments | Lyrics | Add

The Silence in Black and White

myspace.com STANDALONE PLAYER

Hawthorne Heights's Friend Space  
Hawthorne Heights has 201029 friends.



Hawthorne Heights' page on **MySpace** offers free downloads, a band blog, and a place for some 200,000 "friends" to interact.

successfully marketing marginal acts, sent a form letter. "It basically said, 'Don't call us, we'll call you,'" he says.

Bucciarelli wasn't so easily put off. He guessed the email address of Victory president Tony Brummel and sent a message reminding him that Hawthorne Heights was available. "I basically told him Drive-Thru was interested and he should move fast," he says. The tactic worked. Brummel called the next day and asked the band to come to Chicago to play for him and some other people at the label. "We were in heaven," Bucciarelli recalls.

They arrived at Victory's office several hours early on one of the coldest days of the year. "The back window on our van was broken," Bucciarelli recalls, "so we sat huddled together for warmth until Tony showed up to let us into the Victory studio."

They set up, and 20 or so people from the label trickled in. "The studio was big," Bucciarelli says. "It could have fit 100 people, but they all stood in back." They played five songs. Guitarist Casey Calvert was so nervous he nearly puked into the microphone. When they finished, Brummel

thanked them. He said he'd be in touch and left the room.

The band drove the six hours back to Dayton in anguished silence. "We thought they hated us," Bucciarelli says. "Then Tony called the next day and told us to get ready to sign a contract."

Hawthorne Heights could now record an album. But who would buy it?



When Anderson laid out his ideas for DeWolfe in the spring of 2003, he described an online service unlike anything on the Web. It would, he said, be the ultimate social hub: part Friendster, part Blogger, part MP3.com, part craigslist. "The idea was that if it was a cool thing to do online, you should be able to do it on MySpace," he says. That summer, he and DeWolfe pitched the idea to eUniverse (later renamed Intermix Media), which agreed to provide startup capital in exchange for majority interest. The pair hired a team of five programmers and set to work.

DeWolfe, who had a lot of connections to

the Los Angeles creative community, solicited suggestions from bands, artists, and other creative types. At first, growth was slow. A small but fervent community of musicians and club kids, many from the LA area, latched onto the site as a way to promote their music and stay in touch with fans. The site encouraged creativity to the point of chaos. For MySpace's mostly young demographic, their pages were multimedia outgrowths of their jackets, lockers, and notebooks - a place for band stickers, poems, personality quizzes, R-rated photos, and anything else HTML allows.

In September, around the time Hawthorne Heights was sending its demo to Victory, MySpace exploded.

The magnitude of the growth hit Anderson when he flew to San Francisco to see a late-season baseball game. The night before, Anderson had indulged in his obsessive habit of checking the rankings for MySpace. "Over the course of just a few days we'd gone from the 30,000th most popular site to the 3,000th," he says. Sitting in SBC Park watching the Giants beat the Dodgers, he looked around the stadium, taking in **218**>>