

Taking Positive Advantage of a Negative Economy

By [Peter Lawrence Alexander](#) / August 10, 2008

Over the past few weeks, we've been looking at how composers can market themselves in turbulent times. What's opportune about these turbulent times for composers is that we, of all occupation groups, can demonstrate the power of technology and making money staying put.

I have a colleague in Los Angeles who in one year did 150 recording sessions as a guitarist. Of the 150 sessions, five (as in 5) were done in recording studios in Los Angeles. The rest? In his home in the Santa Clarita Valley north of Los Angeles, where 145 sessions were done by e-mail with Digital Performer, and then e-mailed or FTP'ed back to the client. After one "session" (as he reported to me), he and his wife went grocery shopping.

Here's a broad brush of what this means.

The computing industry needs us.

That's because you don't need an 8-Core Mac Pro with 32GB of RAM to run Microsoft Word or iWork's Pages. And you certainly don't need an 8GB PC system to run QuickBooks.

So who needs the 64-bit 8GB+ systems?

We do.

It is we, us, the composers, who on a global basis, outside of certain military and scientific applications, justify the need for the new technology to the Common Man. We demonstrate the amazing things that are possible not just for personal artistic gratification, but to create income and wealth within this new emerging economy.

In May 1969, Thomas Stafford, a US Air Force pilot, became one of 24 Americans to go to the Moon and return. Thirty odd years later, now retired, Stafford and his wife adopted a child. Last Christmas, the child wanted a iPod more power than the 2 GB version he already had. Stafford said this to his young ward, *"Do you realize that the computing power of the iPod you already had is 20 times more powerful than the computing power that was used to put a man on the moon?"*

Think about that for a moment.

The computers we need for music production, are vastly more powerful than the computers that put a man on the moon.

Wouldn't you think that Intel or Microsoft or Apple (or even a company making music production suite software) would want to do a series of print ads outside of traditional music mags or even TV commercials showing off what we do? Oh, I forgot. I did see one. It featured the son of an Intel exec using Cubase.

But nepotism aside...

So let's get serious.

We're now at a place in the United States, and elsewhere in the world, where the cost of buying two tanks of gas, equals the cost of a low end software instrument program. It takes the equivalent of five tanks of gasoline to buy Logic. Another nine tanks to buy a Mac Mini, or even better, a pre-owned G5 that you can pump up to 8GB of RAM.

So, yes, it will take a bit of sacrifice. For example, skip Starbucks and go to Dunkin' Donuts. They have great coffee. It's not as foo-foo, and it has all the atmosphere of an air conditioner, but the coffee is excellent. And did you know that now McDonald's serves a really decent cup-a-joe?

Troubled by high grocery prices? You can buy a pork shoulder (the ham kind) for about \$0.98 per pound. Find a rub recipe, then cook it slow for about 18 hours at 220. When it gets to 175F it hits a resting plane, but then after a while, moves up to 190F to 210F. When it hits that range, pull it out the oven and you now have pulled pork barbecue for which in restaurant you'd pay several dollars for only a few ounces on a bun.

Sometimes sacrificing just means getting your priorities in line, getting back to basics, and focusing on the vision called your dreams.

But it also means crystallizing the vision you have of what you want to accomplish and then going for it. With a little effort, you can save up for EastWest's [Ministry of Rock](#), or one of the under rated gems of our segment of the music business, [Muse from SONIVOX](#). You don't need a \$5000 mic to start. Practice and build your recording skills with a Shure SM57. And if you have children, enfold them into the process.

All success comes through relationships. With a little patience in used book stores or your local thrift store, you can find a beat-up copy of *How to Win Friends and Influence People*. The principles still work today. If you want a more up-to-date book, try *Life's a Campaign* by Chris Matthews of MSNBC's *Hardball*. For advertising, *Confessions Of An Advertising Man* by David Ogilvy is still tops.

On forums, so much time is spent talking about the newest software program that's sure to goose your career to new heights. But you don't hear too much talk about relationship building or the need to acquire business sense.

Or the need to really learn how to market yourself to bring in the bucks. It's like we're too good for the common man to discuss such things. But have you noticed that the people who market creativity make more than those who create?

Whose fault is that?

The only reason it's like that is because composers (and much of music academe) are all too willing to be the sheep, without wanting to take the risk of becoming the shepherd. There are four skill areas composers need to develop in few of which are taught in music school:

- musical craft (and I don't mean the newest software program)
- engineering
- relationship building with some sales training (and follow through!)
- firm grasp of business basics and Intellectual Property Rights

This is the new music curriculum and you get a lot of training online for free by just subscribing to the [NY Times](#) and reading the Business and Arts Sections, especially on Sunday. For financial training,

there's [Morningstar](#), [TheStreet.com](#), [Stockcharts.com](#), much of the online [Wall Street Journal](#), and [Reuters](#).

Lest we forget: the library.

But if you're not near a library, or it's closed when you're open, try [UPenn](#) and their list of 30,000 books online for free. Find a [library](#) online. Hundreds of [museums](#) are online.

For \$15 a month, you can subscribe to the [Naxos Music Library](#) which has over 200,000 classical, jazz, and film score audio tracks to listen to. Some of the lowest priced classical tracks for download can be found at [eClassical.com](#). Then there's Radio 3 for free from the [BBC](#).

Even iTunes and Windows Media Players have outstanding on air Internet radio choices.

My point to you is that even in a negative economy, you are not without resources. And with some financial discipline matched to a vision of what you want to accomplish in music, now is the best time to achieve.

Why now?

Because when an economy tanks, the people and the companies that survive, sustain, and grow, are the ones with the Charlie Hustle to work smarter, harder and faster. There's still a lot of business out there.

You just have to go for it.

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