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Fans, bands connect

June 22, 2007

By Elizabeth Dilts Post-Tribune staff writer

Chris Bauman's not after money or he would have stayed a LaSalle banker -- which made him miserable.

He'll graduate in December with an master's in business administration from Valparaiso University, but his passion is music.

It's his new Web site www.Fanfound.com.

It works like this: Fans, bands and venues all create profiles. By creating a profile, fans can search other bands participating in the site and download and listen to their music for free. The band gets points, which translate to money, every time a fan listens to or downloads a song.

When a user registers as a fan of the band, he or she fills out a profile that sends notifications every time the band plays in the area. For example, the fan can elect to receive a text message every time the band plays within 20 miles of his or her house. The fan knows about shows first and the band gets the guarantee that a show is publicized.

The venue option allows venues to profile bands by fans' demographics. For example, a bar-owner wants to book a band with fans old enough to be in a bar. The venue option allows the bar owner to look at the age and gender statistics of a certain band's fans as well as how near the fans live to the bar.

If the venue owner finds a band he or she wants to book, the owner can place an online bid to invite the band to play.

Bauman wants the site to revitalize the live music experience by getting fans back in venues and off iTunes.

But whether that can be done through the online music industry is yet to be seen.

Chris Simmons of Music Industry Newswire, an online magazine, is skeptical.

"You get a Web page but so what?" Simmons said. How are you going to get people to go to it to support the millions of bands that join it?"

In Simmons' 25 years writing about and working in the music recording industry, he's watched the proliferation of social networking, music-sharing Web sites. Some, like cdbaby.com succeed, and some like mp3.com tank, he said.

Simmons said it's difficult for these sites to offer bands a real return for their advertisement without hiring someone to promote each band.

But as this month's Rolling Stone predicts the fall of the record label industry, it's hard for Bauman to be anything but optimistic about online music-sharing.

"We're not just another music Web site," Bauman said. "There's something intrinsic and magical about live music that you can't get from your iPod. We want to bring people back to live music."

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