

New rock stars use Web videos to win fans



By Yinka Adegoke
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NEW YORK (Reuters) - Chicago alternative rock band OK Go has become more popular on the video-sharing Web site YouTube than it ever was on MTV. The band's treadmill video has been viewed millions of times on the Internet and featured on news programs around the world.

Reuters Photo: Chicago alternative rock band OK Go perform a treadmill dance in this undated publicity photograph....

Music industry watchers can learn from OK Go's experience, which shows that Web users can catapult a band to fame, challenging the popular assumption that videos need to cost thousands of dollars or be directed by Hollywood film directors.

The industry is undergoing a slow, at times painful change from the old way of marketing CDs and TV music videos to going digital with music distribution and online videos, which fans view on the Internet or via media players like Apple Computer Inc.'s popular iPod.

Sites such as YouTube, MySpace, PureVolume and others allow aspiring artists to post videos, usually grainy lo-fi productions, at little or no cost.

OK Go, which is signed to EMI Group's Capitol Records, says its two most popular videos "A Million Ways" and their new hit "Here It Goes Again" -- popularly known as the "treadmill dance" (<http://youtube.com/watch?v=jWCSGGrU9MA>) -- were first uploaded to YouTube by fans who took them from the band's own site, www.okgo.net.

"We're lucky we've had some great ideas," says Damian Kulash, 29, lead singer of OK Go.

"The treadmill video, for instance, was my sister's idea ... and it didn't require a lot of money," he said.

"A Million Ways," made in just five takes, is not only one of the most-viewed videos on YouTube but also one of the most-imitated. Hundreds of spoofs of the dance moves have been added to the site by fans performing everywhere from high school proms to

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have been added to the site by fans performing everywhere from high school proms to wedding parties.

The success of OK Go and other bands' on YouTube has encouraged the start-up to open a dedicated musicians channel for up-and-coming artists. YouTube says 120,000 acts have signed up since its June launch.

Michael Powers, senior product manager at YouTube, says the company took the lead from bands that were already using the site to promote themselves.

Los Angeles-based singer/songwriter Terra Naomi is the 'most subscribed' act on the new YouTube channel. Naomi's YouTube page says she's currently unsigned but YouTube told Reuters she is already attracting the attention of major record companies.

While OK Go and Terra Naomi try to engage fans using Internet music videos, along with clips from live gigs, blogs that invite comment, and pictures, established names are also getting in on the act.

Music mogul Sean 'P Diddy' Combs is a heavy user of the site, according to YouTube (www.youtube.com/diddy).

His postings include various short behind-the-scenes clips of the hip-hop star, rather than videos of his own music or acts on his Bad Boy label.

In many ways YouTube is riding the wave of News Corp. social networking site MySpace (www.myspace.com) and smaller specialist band and fans site PureVolume (www.purevolume.com).

MySpace spokeswoman Dani Dudeck says music has been a key part of its success as a networking site since its September 2003 launch. Bands, very early on, used MySpace to build a fan base and promote gigs. MySpace now works closely with record companies as well as the bands themselves.

YouTube told Reuters earlier this month it hopes to one day offer every music video ever made and said it is talks with record companies to make that happen.

Warner Music Group Corp. is one of the major record companies working with YouTube, MySpace and others and says it doesn't mind that videos from its artists, including superstars like Madonna and R.E.M, might soon be right alongside videos of unsigned artists and the usual comedy fare that populates YouTube's archives.

"We see the social video environment that YouTube has created and the category of user-generated content as being extremely important," says Michael Nash, senior vice president of Digital Strategy and Business Development at Warner Music.

Nash believes that the next stage is for fans to be able to influence or interact with mainstream music videos.

"Inviting fans into the creative process of making videos could really deepen the relationship with the artist," says Nash.

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