

Maximising your chances of getting a lucky break.

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The old musicians' joke: "The harder I practise, the luckier I get!"

1) Bring plenty to the table.

You're selling, and it's a buyer's market. Whether somebody wants to employ you or not depends rather on what you bring to the table. If what you are bringing is no more than the ability to play a steady 4/4 rock beat in a medium tempo, i.e. something that can be learned by most people in an afternoon, then the field will be huge, but so, arguably, may be the requirement for that. Then it's more or less down to who you know.

If on the other hand, you are an unbelievably skilled sight-reading and improvising marimbist, then there are fewer employment opportunities in this much smaller world, but a greater chance of getting work, because there are far fewer applicants.

The more you can offer the better. A singing drummer, or a composing singing drummer, or a composing singing drummer with a van – all are better than just a drummer.

2) Price it right.

It's not uncommon in the "glamour industries" of music, the media, TV, performing arts, to do the first bit for free. These areas are full of what are politely called "interns", people who are essentially hanging about, learning the ropes, waiting for the first opportunity to do it themselves, and then it will be without pay. Maybe a prospective employer will be more inclined to hire you when he hears it's free for the first six dates, or three recording sessions, or whatever. It may take a couple of years of this sort of thing before you actually get paid.

Meanwhile take work in the nearest ancillary industry that will bring you close to the people you want to be with. Want to write songs? Take a day job in a publishing house. Want to break into studios? Tea-boy in a studio. Live work? Back-line rental. These ancillary occupations have traffic going through, opportunities arising.

3) Don't be fussy...

...about the kind of music you might be required to play. At the beginning, any music is good music. You can always play four beats in a bar well or badly. All the time you are meeting people.

4) Smile.

Nobody cares about your problems, they have plenty of their own. So quietly getting on with it is the best approach. Be someone who's nice to have around – because if you're not, they'll find someone who is.

5) Make calls.

Always try to get an onward referral at the end of a cold call. Well, *you* can't offer me a gig, but do you know another promoter who can? *You* can't hire me to play drums, but let me leave a number if the position changes. *You* don't want to write songs with me, but maybe you know somebody who does? Sorry, but this is all sales and cold-calling in the first stages.