

Company Profile - Plastic Head



Based in Wallingford, Oxfordshire, **Plastic Head** made its reputation as a distributor but has since moved into merchandising and also has a stake in labels such as Candlelight and Powerage.

It currently employs over 50 staff and exclusively handles distribution in the UK for over 200 labels across more than 40,000 titles. It was established in 1990 and its co-director/owners are Steve Beatty and Elaine Sutcliffe.

History

Steve Beatty's first real foray into music was through the setting up of his own punk/hardcore label Endangered Music. Although the label's first release was a 7" single in 1985, Steve had already been active on the 'distro' scene, trading fanzines and tapes at gigs and festivals, making many contacts along the way.

After six singles - including a sizeable indie chart hit by Antiseptic - and two LPs, Steve joined forces with John Hyde, owner of a label called Plastic Head. Steve's enthusiasm led to a number of pressing and export deals being struck up at this stage and, disillusioned with the label's current distribution deal, began to start selling direct.



Shortly after, Steve met Elaine Sutcliffe, an ex-Island Records employee who became his business partner and co-director/owner. The newly-formed Plastic Head Distribution's (PHD) first deal was with the German label Nuclear Blast, today one of the world's biggest metal labels and still a PHD client, and the company began to build a solid reputation.

The Next Level

Steve cites the success in 1994 of The Offspring's *Smash* on the Epitaph label as one of the defining moments in PHD's evolution.

Plastic Head - Best Selling Albums - 2009 YTD

	Artist	Title	Label
1	Deathstars	Night Electric Night	Nuclear Blast
2	Chimaira	The Infection	Nuclear Blast
3	Gaslight Anthem	Sink Or Swim	XOXO
4	Nofx	Coaster	Fat Wreck Chords
5	Cannibal Corpse	Evisceration Plague	Metal Blade
6	Nightwish	Dark Passion Play	Nuclear Blast
7	Therapy	Crooked Timber	Demolition
8	Hammerfall	No Sacrifice No Victory	Nuclear Blast
9	Nightwish	Made In Hong Kong	Nuclear Blast
10	Amon Amarth	Twilight Of The Thunder God	Metal Blade



An appositely named album, it sold around 100,000 copies and resulted in a huge number of new accounts for PHD. Soon after, Green Day's first two albums

also shipped around the same amount and, even though Epitaph eventually moved to Pinnacle, other labels - such as Metal Blade and SST - were so impressed with PHD's work on The Offspring that they moved in to fill the void.



Current Repertoire

Plastic Head has come to be known as a specialist in Hard Rock and Metal and its roster of labels includes some of the most influential imprints in the world.

With almost 50 years of trading between them, **Metal Blade** (home to death metal legends Cannibal Corpse and the label that discovered and signed Slayer) and **Nuclear Blast**



(whose *In Flames* and *Dimmu Borgir* Plastic Head helped chart in the UK) are two long-standing partners, with the latter a client for some 18 years. PHD also have an enduring relationship with US punk imprint **Fat Wreck Chords**, which has a catalogue of well over 200 titles.

The company also has a stake in UK stalwart **Candlelight**, whose discoveries have included influential metal acts such as Emperor and Opeth. Emperor's debut full-length, *In The Nightside Eclipse*, is the label's best seller (see chart below). The band are recognised as one of the forefathers of the Black Metal genre and have sold over three quarters of a million albums worldwide.

Candlelight - Best Selling Albums

	Artist	Title	Year of Release
1	Emperor	In The Nightside Eclipse	1994
2	Opeth	My Arms Your Hearse	1998
3	1349	Hellfire	2005
4	Insomnium	In The Halls Of Awaiting	2002
5	Obituary	Darkest Day	2009
6	Emperor	IX Equilibrium	1999
7	Opeth	Orchid	1995
8	Zyklon	World Ov Worms	2001
9	Abigail Williams	In The Shadow Of 1000 Suns	2008
10	Nachtmystium	Assassins	2008

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There is also a new imprint in the form of **Powerage**, a tie-in with Classic Rock magazine, whose signings include Bigelf, New Device and Viking Skull.

Although the company has strong ties to the Metal scene, Plastic Head have always been determined not to be pigeonholed. Some of their recent deals have demonstrated this clearly, with **Cherry Red** - perhaps best known for indie/alternative repertoire - and **Ace** - whose catalogue encompasses Rock 'n' Roll, Soul and Blues - both striking agreements.

Best Sellers

PHD's 2009 best sellers (see chart on previous page) encompass a variety of



styles and nationalities, from the Springsteen tinged festival favourites The Gaslight Anthem to the self-styled 'deathglam' of Sweden's Deathstars and the more

symphonic flourishes of bands such as Finland's Nightwish.

Death Metal is represented in the form of the eleventh album by Cannibal Corpse, widely recognised as the biggest-selling DM band ever, having sold over one million albums in their career.



Beyond the CD

Although CDs form the bulk of the recorded music side of the business, the company also handles a large selection of titles on **vinyl**, one such label being Steve's own Back On Black reissue imprint (see sidebar). Around 5,000 titles are available at any one time. **Merchandising** is another key strand of the business and one that has been in existence for over 15 years. Plastic Head provides merchandise for tours, retail, wholesale and export and has an in-house

design team who work with new clients. At the moment the company produces merchandise for some of the biggest names in Hard Rock, including Queen, Thin Lizzy and AC/DC.

The links already established through the music distribution side of the business means that product can be shipped to retailers around the world, including around 500 key independents. The company also offers **e-commerce** solutions for labels, who can either sell their merchandise through Plastic Head's own online store or have them design and service a bespoke web store of their own.



Digital and Online

The company's **digital** arm, Plastic Head Media (PHM), offers labels a distribution service for the download version of their physical releases, with PHM handling the administration, uploading of content and registration of publishing credits as well as the preparation of metadata. The company also **sell online** direct to the public via www.plastichead.com.

Future Plans

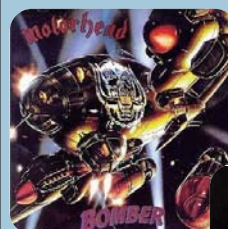
The autumn release schedule has been busy for PHD, with several new Candlelight releases (including full-lengths by Forest Stream, Savage Messiah, Atlas Moth, Insomnium and a mini album by Nachtmystium) and new titles from Rise Above, the label run by Lee Dorrian (Cathedral, ex-Napalm Death). The company are also planning to expand the fast-growing export side of the business.

Back On Black

Back On Black was launched in 1994 and is Steve's own vinyl-only reissue imprint. Every title is remastered and pressed on heavy duty 180 gram vinyl, often coloured.

As a self-confessed LP fan, Steve's chief motivation was simply to "start a label and indulge myself releasing records I liked", although prices on the collector's market were another incentive to make classic titles available on the format once more. Aesthetic issues were another key consideration: "(vinyl)'s big, looks nice and sounds amazing".

Steve licenses from a wide variety of



sources and his catalogue, now encompassing over 150 releases, has taken in artists



such as Motorhead, Megadeth and Slayer as well as cult classics from more underground acts such as Hellhammer, Dissection and Mayhem.

New and forthcoming releases on the label include titles by:

- Corrosion Of Conformity
- Thin Lizzy
- Motorhead
- Mercyful Fate
- Venom
- Arch Enemy
- UFO
- Amon Amarth

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