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Not one to take getting dumped lightly, Cori Ferguson set forth after being downsized from Universal/Polygram and started her own publicity company

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Cori Ferguson may be just another casualty of record-industry merger mania, but don't call her redundant. Instead of whining about how she was squeezed out by the Universal/PolyGram merger, Ferguson, the publicist who was once the Canadian promoter of such acts as Nirvana, Hole, Beck and Sloan, packed her boxes and started her own promotion company.

Now, more than a year later, she's a Canadian music-industry diva in her own right. She is the founder of Cori Ferguson Publicity, and has landed accounts ranging from the up-and-coming heavy metal girl-band Kittie, to her first major event, the North by Northeast music conference held this spring in Toronto. "I decided I didn't want to work for a large corporation again. I like the idea of directing my own destiny," says Ferguson, who was born in Sudbury but has lived in Toronto for the past decade. Her goal is to eventually become "the biggest publicity company in the country," which means pulling ahead of such movie and music promoters as Joanne Smale Productions and Jane Harbury Publicity, the company behind the Junos and other top Canadian entertainment events.

"With the industry turning into mega-labels, now is a really good time for independents," says Ferguson, 33, from her office, which is run out of her home in downtown Toronto with two other staff members. "There is a lot of great talent out there that is not getting the attention it needs because there is so much going on, but they need to get their music heard."

Ferguson's interest in the music business started at 16, when she announced to her father, a lawyer, that her career choice had changed. Instead of following in his footsteps as planned (she had read the Criminal Code by 10), Ferguson wanted to be a radio announcer. She started by writing articles on music for school newspapers, and later became a music buyer for Sam the Record Man's Yonge Street store, before landing her first job at Universal Music. Ferguson worked there for eight years, mainly as a publicist for its Geffen records label, when she says her job became "redundant" after the merger was announced in late 1998.

Last year, the label started dumping acts and, in turn, the employees who promoted them. One of the bands Universal dropped was the Cowboy Junkies. Ferguson approached the Canadian band soon after, saying she was thinking of starting her own publicity company. The group agreed to be her first client. The roster has since grown to include a dozen other acts such as Citizen Kane, the Skydiggers, Captain Tractor and Alice DeeJay. She has just completed a contract to co-ordinate the taping of a TV show featuring singer Steve Earle, and is promoting a couple of music-related Web sites, maplemusic.com and moxie.ca. Her company is also expanding into film, having recently finished doing publicity for Ginger Snaps, a teen horror movie that will premiere at this year's Toronto International Film Festival.



Cori Ferguson
photo by: Mike Watier