

WHAT'S WITH THE FASCINATION WITH THE ECHELON?

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In recent years, an increase in internet erudition has provided a platform for artists to not only express themselves but make their voices heard on a far larger scale. The New Media, a form of communication that utilizes the digital world, has allowed for groups of people to congregate online and share information, in turn making it possible for small and/or unsigned bands to generate a fair amount of buzz and acquire a decent following. Thanks to networks such as MySpace (www.myspace.com) - a website whose network currently counts well over 102 millions "friends" - and the growing popularity of message boards, chat rooms, blogs and live messengers, marketing and promotion can be taken to an entirely new and global level for otherwise local bands.

In doing research for this month's "Feature Presentation" on ascending rock band 30 Seconds to Mars, we discovered that much like the saying "the woman behind the man", the success of 30 Seconds to Mars is in great part due to "the street team behind the band".



Originally, street teams were used by punk and unsigned bands to help promote their upcoming shows or recordings. Usually unpaid, these teams were mostly comprised of teenagers and young adults who were rewarded with free band merchandise or show access, in exchange for a variety of actions; bringing friends to shows, convincing friends to buy band merchandise, phoning local radio stations to request their songs, putting up posters, etc.

Since then, professional street team management firms like M-80 have co-opted the concept, industrializing the efforts not only in relation to the further promotion of an already established artist but also in the pandering of various products. With an exponentially growing number of

entertainment consumers now depending on the internet for information and bands realizing the potential if not the necessity of being "online", there has been somewhat of a return to the traditional usage of street teams.

Named the "Echelon" by Jared and Shannon Leto, 30 Seconds to Mars' founders, this street team was no doubt created for the same purpose. However, it's also something far more extensive. Through the use of the internet, 30 Seconds to Mars has built a virtual army - the Mars Army - joining together forces from around the globe in an effort to convert as many "non-believers" as possible, to this idea that is 30 Seconds to Mars.

"Well, the thing about 30 Seconds to Mars" Jared Leto says, "is that from the very beginning, I took the approach in a sense, that the music is really the soundtrack for the idea that is 30 Seconds to Mars. The artwork, the sense of community, the layers and levels that make such a strong connection to what we are doing. It was just kind of a natural process having some sort of identity to what was going on out there."



TO BE PART OF THE ECHELON IS TO BECOME
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To be part of the Echelon is to become part of an extended family, dysfunctional though it may be. As in any family there are rules, traditions, skeletons in the closet, good times, bad times, conflicts and resolutions. Smaller clans have formed under the guise of "military" divisions but once in a while everyone gets together at "mom and dad's" place - in this case whatever venue the band happens to be performing in that night - and a huge party ensues. The term "dysfunctional family" was given to the Echelon by the band themselves and it's something that this community takes to heart. "Well there's a reality to that. There's a truth to that." Shannon Leto explains.

"There's no family that is functional first of all. We all relate. So when we're saying dysfunctional family, it's the truth that's being spoken. And we are a family. We all agree on certain ideas. Some are more extreme than others, just like some family members are more extreme than others; some are more crazy than others. That's the way it is and it is a family. We all are part of 30 Seconds to Mars."

From an outsider's perspective, joining the ranks of this community can appear daunting. A lot is expected from new members, more so by the Echelon themselves than by the band. A willingness to comply with the rules and the general "belief" systems that are in place is essential. Also, there is a certain level of protection and self preservation that has to be fought through prior to being fully accepted as part of the family.

Older "Echies" who have been part of 30 Seconds to Mars from the beginning and have helped in its creation, implementation and promotion, are now experiencing an influx of new fans who get to profit from the spoils of years of hard work and devotion, without having to do much work themselves. There is a discernable fear that these "newbies" are taking over the stage without much regard for the original purpose or meaning of what the Echelon and 30 Seconds to Mars are. Despite this however, most accept these newcomers with open arms.

This was proven repeatedly when, in an effort to get the facts directly from the source, CONFRONT Magazine approached the Echelon on 30 Seconds to Mars' Online community (<http://thirtysecondstomars.emiforums.com>) and mentioned its interest in doing an exposé on this subject. Many have submitted [pages of text](#) in answer to all our questions and have offered their help and insights, openly and with no more incentive than the opportunity to share of themselves with others as the band have shared of themselves with the Echelon. This is very representative of the sense of community and consociation that 30 Seconds to Mars and their family propagate.

As in any community however, there are those who live on the 'wrong side of town' and tend to be shunned by the rest of the group. In this case, this fringe element would be those that are referred to as biscuits by the Echelon.

"Biscuits are probably more aptly referred to as the conventional groupie. [...] the dynamic between the 'biscuits' and the Echelon is comparable (at least to me) to the dynamic between groupies and 'Band Aids' in [the movie] Almost Famous. 'Biscuits' are on the scene purely because they think such and such a member is hot. They are more fixated on a member's sexual orientation and personal life than the band as an entity. In the 30STM world, groupies are most famous for being Jared Leto fanatics who constantly bang on about how much they love him [and] they completely ignore rules of the community."

- [Simone Thomas-Naqui/Schitzoid](#)

Given that Jared Leto also happens to be a famous Hollywood actor, it's understandable if not accepted that his popularity and pretty face - he was twice chosen to appear in People Magazine's list of the '50 Most Beautiful People'- would draw in the crowds. To varying degrees, the Echelon school of thought on this matter is that 30 Seconds to Mars is an entity; comprised of 4 members, none more important than the other.

"I understand why so many Echelon seem to hate the Jared fangirls, because it's so disrespectful for the band itself to just go to their show because you think Jared is hot! I hate this behaviour too! I'm not like this, I like to see his movies, and I love to [listen to] him, but when I listen to his music, it's because I love his voice, his lyrics, his melodies...not for his body or something!! I love Thirty Seconds To Mars, not Jared the frontman of the band."

- [TAG](#)

"I think for some people there is a bit of a bias. A lot of it has to do with some people wanting to feel superior to others. They create this duality. You can only be one or the other and if you are the other then there is something wrong with you. That happens in life with a lot of things. It also stems from the fact that there are a lot of My So Called Life fans that just come out to the shows to see this guy they watched on TV when they were kids and had a crush on. Those kind of Jared fans are definitely a nuisance and just bother everyone including the band."

- [Brett Walker, Auburn, AL](#) [Screen Name: chief](#)

"I love everything about this band, from the music to the men who make it. I make no apologies for being who I am or for believing in the many facets of 30STM. And I don't think people should be disallowed that right."

- [Minara](#)



What makes 30 Seconds to Mars and by association the Echelon different from other bands and other street teams, is their emphasis on creativity and the communal way in which the band interacts with its 'family'.

The world of 30 Seconds to Mars far outreaches the limitations of making good music and good videos. All the artwork that is involved with this sodality was created by the band and they encourage others to be creative as well. There are dozens of images, logos, glyphs and lyrical imageries to be discovered in this universe.

Leery to share their own interpretations of these things, the band incites the fans to determine for themselves what is being said and offered. This has generated an aggregation of fans who have created their own art through the means of making 30 Seconds to Mars 'gear', computer desktops, 'division' banners and so on.

During a recent trip to Buffalo, NY we met Tori at a 30 Seconds to Mars acoustic in-store performance. During our brief time together, Tori shared with us that for every concert she attended, she created a new 30 Seconds to Mars t-shirt. She had even made one for her grand-mother who was accompanying her.

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"SHE, ALONG WITH OTHER ECHELONS, GAVE THE BAND AN ART PROJECT THEY HAD COLLECTIVELY PUT TOGETHER."

In Cohoes, NY we shadowed Shannon, another Echelon whom we had the opportunity of previously meeting online as she, along with other Echelons, gave the band an art project they had collectively put together.

After having spent a few days following 30 Seconds to Mars for our Feature Presentation interview, it's impossible for us not to understand why the Echelon are so passionate and willing to give of themselves to this band. They do not view it as simply giving of themselves but rather giving back. After every show, 30 Seconds to Mars does a signing where fans who have attended the concert can have their CDs autographed and their pictures taken with the band. They do this for every single person who is in line.

Following this, the band will again sign autographs and take pictures with fans outside their tour bus before heading to the next town. While in Toronto, this 'meet and greet' of sorts lasted well over 90 minutes.

"My brother and I have been doing it ever since we started playing live." Shannon says. "It's become a communal thing now. What's going on with 30STM is just a natural way of doing things for us. There is no other way. And when we get bigger we will have more security around and a maybe an area or something just 'cause there are psychos out there. Fan comes from the word fanatic, we all know what happened to John Lennon and yes there are people like that and we will have to adjust accordingly

as time goes on but we will always be with people. We just like being with people who like our music."

It's apparent that the band as a whole genuinely cares about the individuals they cross paths with during these moments. Often times they know familiar faces by name and make a point of spending a few moments with these individuals as we witnessed with Max at the Toronto concert. Dressed all in white with his eye painted to match, he was a perfect visual representation of a hardcore 30 Seconds to Mars fan, as Jared called out to him in the crowd gathered outside the bus.

As time passes and Echelon numbers grow, these moments of recognition become more and more frequent, Tomo told us. "We've actually made friendships with people. Not like, on a very personal level, but to the point where we get to a place and we know people. We know which people will be at a show. We know that the first 20 kids in line in different regions are always gonna be the same 20 people. On the east coast, the same 20 people are always there. Now it's growing to bigger numbers now. It's fifty people in line."

Of course, as is the case with any following, there are those that take things to an extreme. "There was a girl on our 'Forever Night, Never Day' tour, she cashed in her retirement plan to follow us for two months on the road." Matt shared with us.

When asked how they reacted to such acts of excessive devotion, Tomo answered, "What you want to say is 'Why did you do that?'. But you can't. She felt like that was the right thing to do. You know: her life - her choices. We are very lucky to have people who are willing to do that for us."



"A PERFECT VISUAL REPRESENTATION OF A HARDCORE 30 SECONDS TO MARS FAN, AS JARED CALLED OUT TO HIM"



This recognition and their constant reminding that the fans are as much a part of this project as the band itself, is something the Echelon cherishes.

"The relationship with the band makes me feel a part of something I love. Most bands are so unattainable but here [30 Seconds to Mars] are willing to stay to make [you] feel apart of it and to make everyone feel special they still remember what it was like to be the fan just wanting a min of your time to tell u how amazing u are to them for XYZ reason."

- [Elizabeth \(akaGarnetJ \) \[Michigan Echelon\]](#)

But beyond their relationship with the band, strong bonds have formed between the Echelons themselves.

"This band has been directly responsible for many relationships I have created and maintained with people. I have been a part of the ECHELON street team since early 2003 and I have been places I never thought I would go, met people from all over the world, forged lasting friendships with other ECHELON as well as other people involved with the band. All of which would have never happened had I not known about this band."

- [Tonya Howell](#)

As shown in [Elizabeth13's](#) road trip recap, [\(link\)](#) Echelon members share rides, hotel rooms, food and so on, which allows them to attend more shows and spend as much time as possible with each other. This invitation is also usually extended to anyone who can join them.

It's imperative to mention that this family is not limited to the borders of North America. Despite 30 Seconds to Mars not having done any shows outside of the US and Canada, there are dedicated and active Echelon members worldwide. Currently, a European Echelon Convention is being organized by members, for early September. This will be an opportunity for European fans to congregate, partake in promotional activities, get to know each other and experience the sense of family and belong that is familiar to most North American fans. Hopefully, European tour dates will be announced in 30 Seconds to Mars' fall tour schedule.

Pending this, the Echelon is still first and foremost a street team. As such they are asked to perform certain promotional tasks for the band. Called "Missions", these assignments are sent via e-mail through the band's mailing list and can involve a variety of afore mentioned activities. As shown in these two videos, courtesy of [FrenchyEchelon](#) and her friends over at the French 30 Seconds to Mars website (<http://www.provehito-in-altum.com>) Echelons take pleasure in performing these tasks. It's viewed not only as an opportunity to promote the band they love but as just another chance to get together and have a good time.

Recently, the focus of these missions has been securing 30 Seconds to Mars' victory at the 2006 MTV Video Music Awards, in which they have been nominated for two awards. Although the Echelon do not require anything in exchange for performing the requested tasks, the band has rewarded them with a stream of praise, e-mail messages and pod casts in their honour.

Through these interviews and communications with the Echelon, we have met many incredible people. Some have been more helpful than others; some have been more interested in including us within the folds of this dysfunctional family; but all in all most have treated us with kindness and fairness. The Echelon is unlike any other street team we know of. Their dedication, openness and creativity have inspired us to view 30 Seconds to Mars in a new light and we hope they will do the same for others as well. But again that's just another reflection of what 30 Seconds to Mars stands for as Jared stated to us.

"I think that what is central is the idea of community and identity and that is an important part of 30 Seconds to Mars. It just doesn't stop at music. It doesn't stop there. [30 Seconds to Mars] becomes who you are. And in turn a part of the Echelon. It becomes a defining characteristic of their personality and their lives."

To read full interview transcripts and/or submissions and to view our full picture gallery please visit CONFRONT Magazine's [library of content](#).

