

Releasing MUSIC In The Digital Age



A DIY Guide to Navigating
The Release of Your Music

Submitting Your Release

Releasing music as an independent artist can be daunting. After countless hours of writing, recording, mixing, and eventually receiving your audio files back from the mastering house, you are finally ready to distribute your music. However, before you upload your music to an independent digital distributor (e.g., [CD Baby](#)), take the time to prepare and gather the necessary information you'll need to submit your release. The following list and tips will help you deliver a successful release and hopefully make the process trouble-free.

1. ARTIST/BAND NAME

Is your artist or band name unique or has it already been used? Search the internet and streaming platforms (Spotify, YouTube, iTunes...) to find out. Are there any "Featured" artists that you collaborated with that need to be credited? Also, if your release has 4 or more primary artists, then it will be considered a compilation.

2. RELEASE NAME & SONG TITLES

You'll need the name of the album, EP, or single and all song titles. If you are releasing a new version of a previous release, then you will want to differentiate from the original release by adding a "Title Version." For example, if you're releasing a reissue with unreleased bonus tracks or a remixed or remastered version, then you'll want to add that information as a title version. Examples: Abbey Road (Deluxe Edition), Abbey Road (Remastered 2024), Abbey Road (2024 Remix). You'll also want to add title versions to the song titles if applicable (e.g., Come Together – Remastered 2024).

3. AUDIO FILES

Audio files need to be high quality, NOT MP3s! Upload 16-bit/44.1kHz WAV (CD quality) or FLAC files at a minimum. Some distributors will allow you to upload even higher resolution (e.g., 24bit/96kHz).

4. ARTWORK

The cover art for your release needs to meet certain requirements depending on



your distributor. The dimensions usually need to be at least 3000 x 3000 pixels; some will accept a minimum of 1400 x 1400 pixels. The preferred file is typically PNG or JPEG in RGB color mode at 72 – 300 dpi.

5. SONGWRITER & PUBLISHER INFO FOR EACH SONG

If you want to collect all of your royalties, you will need to provide the names of all songwriters for each song, the name of each songwriter's publisher (even if self-published), and the percentage each songwriter owns per song: known as "splits." If you are releasing a cover song and intend to offer digital downloads and/or physical distribution (CD, Vinyls...), you will need to secure a mechanical license for each cover song you wish to distribute. Services like Easy Song Licensing and Harry Fox's Songfile can help secure the needed licenses and facilitate payment of mechanical royalties. Also, Be sure that the liner notes contain the correct copyright notices for all of the songs on your release (i.e., both for your original songs and any cover songs that you are using). And that the song credits correctly state the name of the song's publisher and the publisher's performing rights organization (i.e., ASCAP, BMI, etc.).

6. ADDITIONAL METADATA

Other info you'll need to provide is whether each song is an original or cover version, live or studio version, public domain, or contains explicit lyrics.

7. UPC CODES

All releases need a unique universal product code (UPC, aka barcode). If you're unable to supply one, most distributors will provide one for you.

8. ISRC CODES

ISRC (International Standard Recording Code) is the globally recognized standard numbering system for audio and music video recordings. It's a 12-digit alphanumeric code that functions as a universal identification number for each sound recording (song/track or video). They are essential for properly tracking royalties on digital music services. Again, if you're unable to supply the codes, most distributors will provide them for you. If you're working with a label, then they should provide the ISRCs and a UPC for your release. NOTE: if you're releasing a lead single(s) ahead of an album release, you should use the same



ISRC code(s), however, you will need a separate UPC for the single.

9. RELEASE DATE

Most distributors can make your music available in a matter of days, however, if it's a new music release, you will want to set a date weeks in the future so that you have plenty of time to promote your new release. We recommend setting a release date 10 to 12 weeks out (see Promote Your Release below).

10. PRE-ORDER DATE

Another advantage of setting an advanced release date is the ability to offer fans the option to pre-order your music on iTunes, Amazon, and Bandcamp (see Upload to Bandcamp below) ahead of its official release date. This allows you to put out a call to action (CTA) to prompt your fans to pre-order the release any time you're promoting and generating pre-release buzz.

11. LABEL & COPYRIGHT INFO

If you are self-releasing your music without the help of a record label, then you are the label. If you created and funded your own release, then you (the artist) are the copyright owner of the sound recordings (aka "masters" or phonorecord). The P-Line © in the credits identifies the rights owner of a sound recording. Whereas the C-Line © identifies the rights owner of the written music and lyrics (compositions).

12. MUSIC DESCRIPTION

You will need to describe your music and categorize it into a genre and maybe subgenres if applicable. Try to write a short, one to two sentences, description of your music that includes genre/subgenre, style(s), and mood(s). You may also want to compile a short RIYL (Recommended If You Like) list of well-known artists you sound similar to or influenced your sound and/or songwriting. You will also need this for your press kit (see Update/Create a Press Kit below).



Now Upload Your Music To Bandcamp

Why? [Bandcamp](#) is a stand-alone online record store and music community. Artists and labels upload music to Bandcamp and control how they sell it, setting their own prices, offering users the option to pay more, and the ability to set up pre-orders. Uploading music to Bandcamp is **free**. The company takes a 15% commission on sales, which drops to 10% after an artist's sales surpass \$5,000, plus payment processing fees. Bandcamp is similar to iTunes except digital downloads are offered in lossy formats MP3 (LAME, 320k or V0), AAC and Ogg Vorbis, and in Hi-Res lossless formats FLAC, ALAC, WAV, and AIFF. In addition to downloads, artists can sell their music on physical media such as CDs or vinyl and offer merch (t-shirts, hats, stickers...). Artists can customize the design of their page and include a bio, artist photo, links, contact info, and the ability to include liner notes on releases. Artists can also include bonus items with release purchases such as hidden/bonus tracks, PDF liner note booklets, photos, videos, etc. Many artists/bands that do not have a traditional website use Bandcamp for their official site. Plus, there is a large community of fans waiting to discover your music there. Bandcamp is a no-brainer...you need to offer your music, and merch, there.

After Submitting Your Release

➤ REGISTER YOUR COPYRIGHT

If you haven't already, register your copyright with the [Copyright Office](#) of the Library of Congress. In most instances, you can file **Form SR** to cover both the musical composition and the sound recording of that musical composition if you own both. This can all be done electronically online (including uploading your audio files) via their website.

➤ REGISTER SONGS WITH PRO & MLC

Be sure to register your songs with your PRO (ASCAP, BMI), the MLC, and potentially SoudExchange (see Music Royalties & Publishing Info below).

➤ UPDATE OR CREATE A PRESS KIT (EPK)

Again, if you haven't already, you should start creating your electronic press kit (EPK). It will be very difficult to promote your upcoming release without one. Your EPK may include your music bio, downloadable audio files for promotional use (Dropbox folders work great for this) and a music player (many artists use a



privately embedded Soundcloud or Bandcamp player or link), cover art (JPEG or PNG), artist press photo(s) (Hi-Res JPEG(s) or PNG(s) preferred), press release, release-sheet/one-sheet (release date, tracklist, focus tracks, FCC clean & explicit lyric tracks, genre(s), RIYL, label, publisher, band members/artist info), press clippings/music reviews, achievements/awards (don't forget your Grammys), tour dates/events, music videos, social links, discography, and contact info. If you have an official website, a hidden page is the perfect place to host your EPK. Another option is to upload files (audio, JPEG, PDF docs...) to a file hosting/sharing service (e.g., Dropbox, Google Drive), then share the folder link, or your EPK page URL, with media outlets in emails and press releases.

➤ **CLAIM YOUR OFFICIAL ARTIST PROFILES**

Spotify, Apple Music, Amazon Music, Tidal, Pandora, and YouTube all allow to claim your official artist profile. This allows you to customize and manage your profile and view analytics/data. Most distributors, like CD Baby, have links/tools to facilitate access to your profiles. You can also manually request access. For example, you can submit a request to claim your profile at [Spotify for Artists](#).

➤ **UPDATE YOUR SOCIAL PROFILES**

Update your social profiles with a new artist pic/cover photo and bio announcing your upcoming release with a link to pre-order.

➤ **PROMOTE YOUR UPCOMING RELEASE!**

Although many artists dread this task, this is where the real work begins. Promoting a release usually involves a 12-week marketing campaign that may include radio promo, press (magazines/blogs), social media (posts & ads), email marketing (e.g., Mailchimp), web ads, playlist pitching, album release party/show, touring, etc. If your budget allows, you may opt to hire professional help with expertise in your genre to promote your release, like a music publicist/PR company and/or radio promoter.

Music Royalties & Publishing Info



Royalties Types

The bulk of your royalties will be generated from sound recording copyrights (i.e., recording royalties). These include streaming, digital downloads & physical sales (CD, vinyl), and non-interactive streaming & satellite radio, like Pandora and Sirius XM Radio. Besides recording royalties, compositional copyrights can generate four royalty types (i.e., publishing royalties): **Performance**, **Mechanical**, **Sync**, and **Print**.

Performing Rights Organization (PRO)

A performance rights organization (PRO), also known as a performing rights society, provides intermediary functions, particularly the collection of royalties, between copyright holders and parties who wish to use copyrighted works publicly in locations such as shopping and dining venues. They also monitor terrestrial radio airplay and live performances. Royalties collected from these performances are then paid to the songwriters and publishers who claim ownership of the songs. PROs charge a blanket licensing fee for radio stations, venues, and even restaurants for the rights to host performances of the songs in the PRO's catalog. The two main PROs in the US are [ASCAP](#) and [BMI](#). **If you haven't already, you need to join a PRO and register your original songs to collect your performance royalties.** If you don't want to set up a separate publishing affiliate with a PRO, both ASCAP and BMI allow songwriters to collect the publisher's share directly.

Performance Royalties

When a song is played publicly – via traditional radio, through speakers at a restaurant or store, or a live performance – that “performance” generates performance royalties. These royalties are collected by the PRO and then distributed to its members. Royalties are split 50/50 between the songwriter(s) and publisher(s). Also, if you're performing live or touring, you should submit your setlist with your PRO. You may be able to collect some performance revenue.

Mechanical Royalties

Mechanical royalties, payable to songwriters or song copyright owners, are generated whenever a song is reproduced in a digital or physical format. While its definition is rooted in the player piano rolls of the early 1900s, mechanical royalties apply to everything from physical formats like vinyl, cassette tapes, and CDs to MP3 song downloads and streams.

Mechanical royalties are also generated by artists recording their version of another songwriter's composition (i.e., cover version). If someone wants to record a song you



wrote, they must pay the current mechanical rate in the U.S., which is 12.4 cents per copy (digital downloads, CDs, & vinyl). These mechanical royalties are paid to a mechanical agency (e.g., Harry Fox Agency) or publisher.

Mechanical Licensing Collective (MLC)

[The Mechanical Licensing Collective](#) (MLC) is a nonprofit organization established under the Music Modernization Act of 2018. It was created to issue blanket mechanical licenses for qualified streaming services in the United States, such as Spotify, Apple Music, Amazon Music, and Tidal. They are responsible for collecting mechanical royalties from streaming platforms in the U.S. To resolve the issue of music creators not getting paid mechanical royalties for their work, the MLC built a publicly accessible musical works database and portal that creators and music publishers can use to submit and maintain their musical works data. This is so that when their music is played on streaming services, the generated royalties are collected from digital service providers and distributed to the appropriate songwriters, composers, lyricists, and music publishers. **Anyone who is entitled to receive digital audio mechanical royalties in the United States needs to become a Member of The MLC. This includes music publishers and administrators and self-administered songwriters, composers, and lyricists.**

Sync Licensing & Royalties

Synchronization licensing grants permission to synchronize a song with television, film, or advertisements. Sync licenses are required from both the recording owner and the composition owner when a song is used, and they are most often paid as a one-time up-front fee. In addition to the upfront fee, songs earn a performance royalty (payable to songwriters/publishers) when the program containing their song is broadcast or streamed. This is reported to your PRO who then pays you the royalties.

Printed Music Royalties

Printed music royalties are royalties generated from the sale of sheet music. Income generated from printed music royalties is split between songwriters and publishers. It's negligible compared to other revenue streams these days, but it still exists.

Music Publishing Administrators

Music publishing administrators (e.g., Songtrust, Sentic) are music rights management services/companies that provide royalty collection services for songwriters. They do this by registering and licensing your songs, for a fee, with the proper entities, including PROs, Mechanical Rights Agencies/Organizations (e.g., Harry Fox Agency & Music Reports), & Collective Management Organizations (used in most countries, except the US, to collect and pay out royalties for performing and mechanical licenses for their members). Their service can be particularly beneficial in the difficulty of collecting



mechanical royalties internationally.

SoundExchange

[SoundExchange](#) is an American non-profit collective rights management organization founded in 2003. It is the sole organization designated by the U.S. Congress to collect and distribute digital performance royalties for sound recordings. It pays featured and non-featured artists and master rights owners for the non-interactive use of sound recordings on satellite and Internet radio services like SiriusXM and Pandora. **If you're getting rotation on satellite and/or Internet radio, you need to create an account and register your tracks with SoundExchange to collect those royalties.**

Final Considerations

Agreement Between Group Members

If you're part of a music group that hasn't incorporated, formed a partnership, or limited liability company (LLC), a simple written agreement between the members regarding finances is always a good idea.

Sampling Clearances

If your release contains any samples, you need to obtain a "sample clearance" from the copyright owners (recording & publishing).

Cover Songs

The majority of large streaming platforms (Spotify, Apple Music, Amazon...) already pay out streaming royalties to the rights holders/publishers for cover songs (see MLC above). So typically you will only need a license for digital downloads (not streaming). If you're offering physical formats too (CDs, vinyl), then you will need an additional license.

If you are interested in learning more about the music industry, the book [This Business of Music](#) has been the industry bible for decades ([free PDF](#)).

Note: you should always consult an experienced entertainment attorney for any legal issues or advice.



Hopefully, this guide will give you the basics to allow you to hit the ground running with your release. Of course, there are plenty of online resources to explore if you want to take a deeper dive into any of the topics covered.

Visit EatinRecords.com for more resources or to submit your music to our Spotify playlists!

Eatin' Records is an independent record label, studio, and playlist curator originally based in Chicago and now located in Portland.



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