

Releasing Your Music

Objective

Understand how to distribute and sell your music professionally.

Why It Matters

Streaming helps discoverability, but direct sales and live shows remain essential.

Good practices

Use aggregators (such as DistroKid or CDBaby) wisely. Treat streaming as promotion rather than primary income.

Own your direct channel. Bandcamp is your best revenue tool. Build an e-mail list from day one. Stay in control.

Show up. No platform replaces playing live. Shows build audiences that digital never reaches on its own.

Physical is not dead. Vinyl record = a collectible, a statement, a merch item. Small pressings = profitable if you have a real fanbase.

Be smart about labels. A label deal is a partnership. Research the label, understand the contract and don't give away more than you need to.

Start simple, stay consistent. You don't need everything at once. One release done well bears five releases done poorly.

Common mistakes

Expecting streaming to replace live income

Releasing too much music too quickly

Ignoring direct fan communication



- ☐ Distributor selected
- ☐ Streaming profiles created
- ☐ Bandcamp page active

- ☐ Release visuals prepared
- ☐ Merch ready for shows

Interreg



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Releasing Your Music

1. Digital distribution

Artist > Aggregator > Stores > Listener

Examples of aggregators:

- DistroKid
 - \$24.99/year flat fee, unlimited releases
 - 0% streaming royalties (on paid plans)
 - Add-ons: YouTube Content ID, VEVO distribution, ...
 - Cover song license options
 - Legacy feature
 - Fast delivery (24-48h)
- CDBaby
 - One-time fee per release (\$9/single, \$14.99/album)
 - 9% streaming royalties
 - Good for sync licensing and PRO collection
 - Also handles physical distribution (US)
 - No cover song license option

Streaming income:

- €0,003 per stream (Spotify average) > 333.000 streams to earn €1.000
- Min. 1000 streams within last 12 months!

Why bother with streaming?

- Discoverability: Spotify editorial playlists, algorithmic recommendations, Shazam – listeners find new music through these channels.
- Global reach: your music is available in 180+ countries, even if you never play there fans are able to find you.
- Legitimacy: labels, bookers, promoters and journalists check your Spotify. Presence signals you're active and serious.
- Complementary, not substitution: streaming does not generate income for small artists, it's a marketing tool that supports physical sales and live performances

2. Physical media

Vinyl

- 12", 10" or 7"
- Pressing plant turnaround: 3-6 months
- Minimum press for vinyl: usually 300 copies (variants possible)
- Collectors love exclusive editions and limited colour variants (tour editions, bandcamp edition, indiestore edition, RSD edition, die-hard edition)

CD

- Still the cheapest physical format
- Turnaround: 4-6 weeks
- Minimum: usually 300 copies
- Digipack, jewel case or slimpack options
- Lower pricing, sells good at shows
- Great alternative for shipping abroad

Cassette (tape)

- Very exclusive/niche market
- Turnaround: 1-2 months
- Only for a special edition (or a niche audience)

3. Direct sales

1. Bandcamp (your best friend as an indie artist!)

- Fan-first platform: listeners pay what they want or you set a price. You keep 80-85% after fees.
- Built-in e-mail list: every buyer can opt-in to updates (= gold for direct communication)
- Physical + digital: bundle a vinyl + download in one purchase, collectors love this format
- Bandcamp Fridays: Bandcamp waives their fees every first Friday of each month. Push releases on these dates!

2. Live shows

- Be your own merch table
- Still #1 sales channel
- Bring a box of vinyl and CDs every time
- Bundle records with t-shirts or stickers.
- People at shows are already fans, convert that energy into a sale

4. Working with a label

1. What does a label actually do?

- Finance production: recording, mixing, mastering, artwork — a label may front these costs (recoupable from sales)
- Press and distribute: manufacture physical copies, get them into distro channels (Bandcamp, shops, online stores)
- PR & promotion: pitching to journalists, radio, blogs, playlist editors — this is real work that takes time and contacts
- Booking support: some labels have booking connections; they can open doors to festivals and tours
- Advance cash: bigger labels offer advances — money you repay through royalties (recoupment)
- Credibility: the right label's name on a release signals quality to journalists and promoters

2. How to approach a label

Do's:

- Research first — make sure the label releases music in your genre. Listen to their catalog.
- Have a demo or release ready — don't pitch before you have recorded material to share.
- Write a short, personal email — who you are, what the music sounds like, how you heard of the label and what you expect from them and a Bandcamp or SoundCloud link. No attachments.
- Show that you've done the work — have you played shows? Do you have a social following? Labels invest in active bands.
- Be patient — label owners are usually part-time (like me!). Give it 2–4 weeks before following up.
- Start small — local or regional labels first. Build a track record.

Don'ts:

- Don't send mass emails to 50 labels at once
- Don't ask for a deal before you have music ready
- Don't expect an advance from a small label
- Don't expect to be released within a month, there is a schedule, other releases, plannings and lead-times.
- Don't sign away everything — read the contract

3. What a label deal looks like

What the label provides:

- Pressing costs
- PR & promotion budget
- Artwork budget
- Distribution set-up
- Storage & fulfillment

What you give/get in return:

- Rights to manufacture & sell the release (= licensing contract)
- Royalties: 10-20% on physical items upfront, 50/50 digital
- Exclusivity on physical release (often 2-5 years)
- Sometimes: first right of refusal on next album
- Recoupment: you repay costs from your royalties

Important: always ask for:

- a clear recoupment statement,
- reversion of rights if the label goes inactive,
- control of your master recordings (if possible).