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Music Distribution Checklist



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Everything you need to release your music.

You only get one chance to officially release your new music to the world, so you want to **do it right**.

While it only takes minutes to upload a single or album for distribution, you'll want to spend a bit more time gathering everything beforehand.

So here's a quick checklist to help you prepare your music for an official (and successful) release.

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1. AN ARTIST NAME
2. THE SONG TITLES
3. THE TITLE OF THE RELEASE
4. HIGH-QUALITY AUDIO
5. COVER ARTWORK
6. ANY OTHER PRIMARY OR FEATURED ARTIST CREDITS
7. THE SONGWRITER & PUBLISHER INFO FOR EACH SONG
8. ADDITIONAL METADATA
9. UPC CODE
10. ISRC CODES
11. THE RELEASE DATE
12. PRE-SALE DATE
13. DESCRIPTIONS OF YOUR MUSIC
14. YOUR MUSICAL RESUME
15. A PAYMENT METHOD
16. YOUR LABEL & COPYRIGHT INFORMATION

WHAT YOU'LL NEED TO PROPERLY DISTRIBUTE YOUR MUSIC WORLDWIDE:

1. An artist name

This is the name you release music under. It could be your given name, a band name, or a moniker.

If you're releasing music for the first time, **Google your artist name to make sure it's not already being used by another group or artist.** Search popular streaming platforms like Spotify and YouTube as well.

If you find another artist is using an identical or similar name, you might consider changing your artist name to avoid confusing your listeners, playlists, etc.

2. The song titles

Because songs need titles, just like babies need names.

3. The title of the release

Your name for this collection of songs — like an album name.

If you are releasing a single, the name of the release can be the name of the song. Nice and simple!

4. High-quality audio

16-bit WAV or FLAC is ideal (in stereo, at 44.1kHz sample rate).
No crappy MP3s!

5. Cover artwork

Your cover art must meet these requirements:

- 1400 x 1400 pixels minimum; 3000 x 3000 pixels maximum
- PNG, GIF, JPG, or JPEG file type
- 72 - 300dpi (300dpi is the best)
- Less than 25mb
- RGB color scheme (not CMYK)

Other guidelines on cover art content available [HERE](#).



For an in-depth discussion about cover artwork and DIY design tips, check out [this episode](#) of the *DIY Musician Podcast*.

6. Any other primary or featured artist credits

Ask your collaborators how they want to be credited, because it's not always clear cut.

Some may want MORE of a spotlight than you feel they deserve. Others might prefer NOT to be mentioned at all. So make sure to have those conversations ahead of time.

Credit info will be delivered to digital music platforms along with your music. This type of “metadata” can help your music reach those other artists’ audiences.

Primary artists are the main artists on a recording. Often there is only one primary artist (for example: Ed Sheeran), but occasionally music is released with multiple primary artists listed. This is done when two or more artists that do not usually work together collaborate on an album or single (for example: Robert Plant & Alison Krauss). Multiple primary artists for a release are also referred to as “compound artists.”

Collaborators who DO work together on an ongoing basis can enter their “band name” as a single primary artist (for instance, “Brooks & Dunn” or “Simon & Garfunkel”).

“Featuring” artists are those who collaborate on specific tracks, but who should not receive primary artist billing for the release.

7. The songwriter & publisher info for each song

To ensure that digital music services are paying publishing royalties properly, and that all songs are correctly licensed, you will need to provide:

- The names of the **songwriters** for each track (including cover songs)
- The names of those songwriters’ **publishers** (if applicable)
- The **“splits”** for each songwriter (the percentage of a song that each songwriter owns)

If you’re releasing a cover-song, you must secure the proper mechanical license before you distribute the track. Check out [**Easy Song Licensing**](#), an online service that will help you quickly license the cover you’ve recorded.

8. Additional metadata

Digital music services like Spotify and Apple Music need to know if your recording is:

- a live version
- a cover song
- in the Public Domain
- or has explicit content

You'll probably be able to answer these questions quickly during the distribution process, but it still helps to review your lyrics and think back through the writing and recording processes.

The time to remember “oh yeah, my album DOES have a live track” or “I forgot I sang f\$%k in that one song” is BEFORE your release.

9. UPC code

A barcode (also known as a UPC, or universal product code) is a unique numeric and graphical identifier that's used in digital and physical distribution. If you already have a barcode for this song or album, you can enter the number during the distribution signup process. If not, don't worry; CD Baby can create one for you.

This is just a heads up that you'll need one.

Also, **your barcode should NOT be on your cover artwork.**

If you manufacture physical CDs or vinyl, the barcode should be on the back cover.



For more about barcodes, visit our [Help Center](#).

10. ISRC codes

These are song identifier codes, essential for proper tracking of activity and payments in the digital music world. CD Baby can assign them.

If you're putting out an album that contains a song that was already released as a single, be sure to keep the ISRC for that track the same. This will preserve the song's stream count on platforms like Spotify.

11. The release date

When do you want your music to drop? You get to set the date that your new release becomes available.

If you can, make it at least three to four weeks out. Many promo opportunities on digital platforms require advance planning.

CD Baby can make your music available in a matter of days, but you will miss out on your chance to do things like pre-save campaigns, Release Radar submissions, and more.



For more on release planning, see the [Release Plan Generator](#).

12. Pre-sale date

Do you want your fans to be able to purchase your music on iTunes or Amazon **ahead of its official release**? Set that up at least 30 days in advance.

If you want to do a Spotify pre-save or follow campaign ahead of your release, our [Release Plan Generator](#) will provide you with instructions and a timeline.

13. Descriptions of your music

Describing your own music can be hard. But it's really important.

Not just because good descriptions help you with your marketing, they're also delivered as metadata to streaming platforms.

This info helps your music become more discoverable in searches.

Once you know how to describe your music and who it's for, compile the following things:

- Written blurb about your music
- Genre designations
- Suggested moods
- Sounds-like artists (also sometimes referred to as RIYL or "Recommended If You Like")

14. Your musical resume

Do you have achievements to brag about? Names to drop? Positive reviews? Festival slots? Big sync or playlist placements? A sizable audience on streaming or social platforms?

Now is not the time to be shy or humble. Put together a list of your accomplishments. It'll be helpful when you **update your website** and rewrite your bio. But more specific to the distribution process, this is the EXACT kind of information CD Baby needs in order to make your music go further. Through our *Stages* program, we offer a suite of music marketing and label services (for free) to artists on a growth trajectory.

To see if you qualify, go **HERE** and fill out the form.

15. A payment method

In order to get paid for your sales and streams, you will need to provide:

- Preferred payment info (PayPal, direct deposit to bank account, Payoneer, etc.)
- Tax ID (SSN, TIN, or FTIN)
- Tax form (W8 or W9)

16. Your label & copyright information

If you funded your recording or created your music on your own, YOU are the label and copyright owner. If another person is claiming ownership of the sound recording, they should be listed as the label and copyright owner.

Again, this might be the type of question that you'd easily answer during the distribution process. But sometimes ownership can be a sticky discussion. If so, talk to your bandmates, producers, beatmakers, collaborators, or label reps ahead of time.

When it comes to copyright, it's best to have no surprises!



For more on information about music copyright, [read this](#).

Hopefully this checklist helps you get ready to release your music.

When you do, CD Baby is here to help you with everything AFTER the release too, from marketing tools, to artist networking, sync licensing, and beyond.

Check out some of our educational resources below!

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| <p>DIY MUSICIAN BLOG</p> <p>Read helpful tips on every aspect of life in the DIY music business</p> <p><u>CHECK IT OUT</u></p> | <p>DIY MUSICIAN PODCAST</p> <p>Enjoy lively discussions by and about musicians thriving beyond labels</p> <p><u>CHECK IT OUT</u></p> | <p>DIY MUSICIAN CONFERENCE</p> <p>Take your career to the next level with IRL networking & showcases</p> <p><u>CHECK IT OUT</u></p> |
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CD Baby is a complete artist services platform, built by musicians, for musicians.

And we're here to help independent artists like you thrive.

Ready to take the next step? **Sign up.**