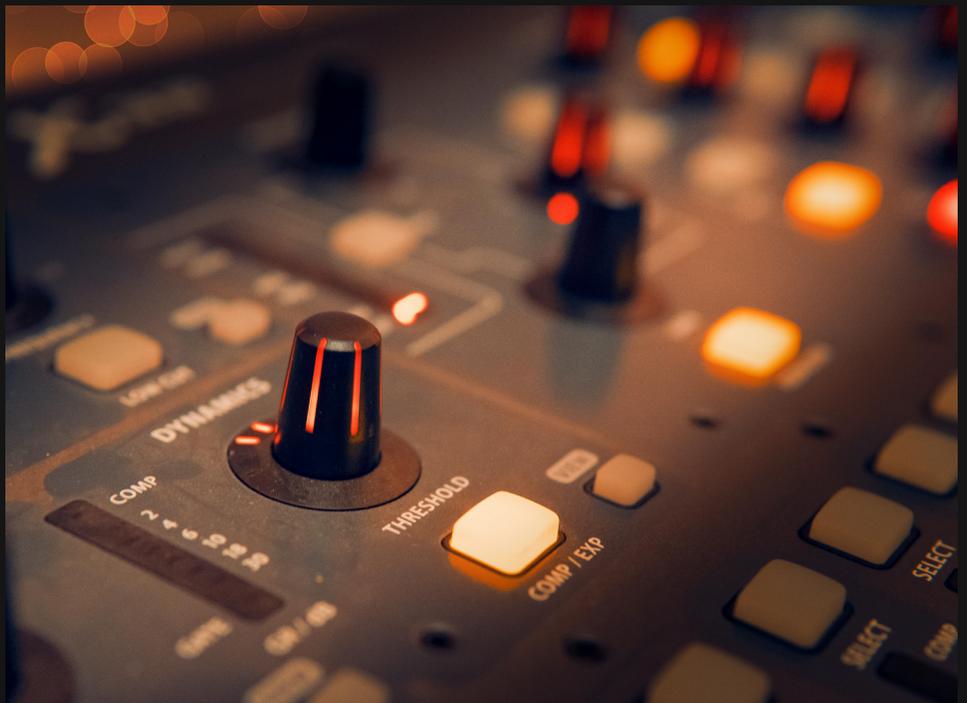




# THE MUSIC DISTRIBUTION PLAYBOOK



# INTRODUCTION

With CD Baby, submitting your music only takes minutes, but setting yourself up for success requires preparation.

Major streaming platforms have strict guidelines, and your music, metadata, and creative assets must meet them to avoid delays or rejection. Taking pride in your music to review your submission for accuracy will ensure your release goes live on schedule and you get paid for your streams.

If you're an independent artist looking to release your music, CD Baby offers affordable distribution to over 150 streaming platforms, including Spotify and Apple Music, as well as tools and services to power your career. Since 1998, CD Baby has paid out over \$1 billion in royalties to a growing community of two million independent artists. Create a CD Baby account today and start taking your music further.

[CREATE A CD BABY ACCOUNT](#) 

## HERE'S AN OVERVIEW OF THE DISTRIBUTION PROCESS:

### 1 Prepare for Distribution

- Choose an artist name
- Title your release and/or tracks
- Record high quality audio
- Finalize cover art
- Arrange songwriter credits

### 2 Generate Metadata

- CD Baby can generate ISRCs and UPCs
- Know your genre, soundalikes, and other key descriptors of your music

### 3 Plan for Release

- Set a release date
- Submit payment info
- Submit label and copyright information

# 1. PREPARE FOR DISTRIBUTION



## CREATE AN ORIGINAL ARTIST NAME

Your artist name could be your real name, stage name, or a band name! There's nothing more exciting than a fresh debut, but choose your artist name wisely!



### 1. Make sure your artist name isn't taken.

Submitting music under an unoriginal or generic artist name makes it difficult for fans to find you and can cause issues with profile verification on streaming platforms. Confirm your artist name isn't taken by querying search engines and major streaming platforms.



### 2. Choose a name you love.

Changing your artist name across platforms can be a difficult and long process. Save yourself the hassle by choosing a name you'll want to grow with.



# 1. PREPARE FOR DISTRIBUTION

## ✓ FINALIZE YOUR SONG TITLES AND ALBUM TITLE

Provide titles for your tracks and release. If you're releasing a single, you should use the same name as the released track. If you're releasing an album, you can create an original title for the release or reuse the title of a track on the album. That's called a title track! Here are some more do's and don'ts.

### DO

- ✓ Provide original, descriptive, and memorable track and release titles. You'll want your fans to remember them!
- ✓ Be consistent with capitalization and grammar across track titles
- ✓ (If applicable) Make sure your submitted album title corresponds EXACTLY to the title on your cover

### DON'T

- ✗ Give songs generic or technical names (e.g. beat 1, beat 2, or track 1, 2, 3... etc.)
- ✗ Name tracks after other artists
- ✗ Write excessively title lengths
- ✗ Use extraneous parentheticals
- ✗ Use odd punctuation
- ✗ Include dates or years
- ✗ List primary artists as featured artists
- ✗ Include URLs, contact information, social media names, or streaming service names

# 1. PREPARE FOR DISTRIBUTION

## ✓ CHECK YOUR AUDIO QUALITY

Streaming platforms have high audio standards to provide listeners with a great experience.

**Submit your music in the following format:** 

**16-BIT WAV  
OR FLAC**

**44.1KHZ  
SAMPLE RATE**

**STEREO**

Although it's not required for distribution, we highly recommend mastering your files. Mastering improves the listening experience for your fans and makes your songs better suited for playlisting.

**LEARN MORE ABOUT MASTERING** 



# 1. PREPARE FOR DISTRIBUTION

## ✓ COVER ARTWORK

Cover art is a leading reason music submissions are delayed or rejected. Ensure your artwork follows platform guidelines.

### Your artwork file must follow these requirements:

- 3000 X 3000 PIXELS MAXIMUM; 1400 X 1400 PIXELS MINIMUM
- PNG, GIF, JPG, OR JPEG FILE TYPE
- 72 - 300DPI (300DPI IS THE BEST)
- LESS THAN 25MB
- RGB COLOR SCHEME (NOT CMYK)

Generic artwork (such as a solid color square with no text) may not be accepted. We recommend including information on the cover image and submitting professional and compelling artwork.

*Note: If your artist name and the title of your release appear on your cover artwork, they **must precisely match the release title and artist name you provided on your submission.** Any discrepancies between your metadata and cover art can lead to delays or rejection on your release.*

[LEARN MORE ABOUT COVER ART](#) →



# 1. PREPARE FOR DISTRIBUTION

## ✓ GATHER ARTIST AND SONGWRITER CREDITS

Document and discuss artist and songwriter credits between those who were involved in making your music. You'll need to include this information within your submission.

 PRIMARY ARTISTS	 FEATURED ARTISTS	 COMPOUND ARTISTS
Main performing artist(s)	Guest appearances on track(s)	Two individual artists presented together
Ascribe lyrics and instrumentation credits	Ascribe lyrics and instrumentation credits	Ascribe lyrics and instrumentation credits. Frequent collaborators (e.g. Simon & Garfunkel) can enter as a "band name"

## LEARN MORE ABOUT SONGWRITER CREDITS



# 1. PREPARE FOR DISTRIBUTION

## ✔ SONGWRITER & PUBLISHER INFO

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

**NAMES OF THE  
SONGWRITERS FOR  
EACH TRACK**

(including cover songs)

**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. You can obtain licensing for most covers through [Easy Song Licensing](#), an online service.

## ✔ IDENTIFY TRACK ATTRIBUTES

To accurately list your track, streaming platforms need to know if your recording is:



A LIVE VERSION



A COVER SONG



IN THE PUBLIC DOMAIN



CONTAINS EXPLICIT CONTENT

Review lyrics and track notes to ensure your answers are accurate. Any discrepancies can lead to delays or rejections on your release.

# 2. GENERATING METADATA

## ✓ UPC BARCODE

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 your song(s), you can enter the number during the distribution signup process.

**If you do not have a UPC barcode, CD Baby can easily create one for you.**

*Tip: Your barcode should NOT be on your cover artwork.*

[LEARN MORE ABOUT UPCs](#) →

## ✓ ISRC CODE

An International Standard Recording Code (ISRC) is a song identification code that allows platforms and distributors to track streaming activity and payments for your work. 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. That will preserve the song's stream count on platforms like Spotify.

*CD Baby will assign a unique ISRC code to any new tracks you submit for distribution.*

[LEARN MORE ABOUT ISRCs](#) →

## 2. GENERATING METADATA

### ✔ DATA FOR DISCOVERY

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 makes your music more discoverable in searches and more identifiable for fans. **Once you know how to describe your music and who it's for, compile the following things:**

**WRITTEN  
BLURB ABOUT  
YOUR MUSIC**  
(3-5 sentences)

**GENRE  
DESIGNATIONS**  
(primary and  
subgenre)

**SUGGESTED  
MOODS**  
(e.g. dreamy,  
upbeat, intense)

**SOUNDS-LIKE  
ARTISTS**  
(also sometimes referred  
to as RIYL or "Recom-  
mended If You Like")



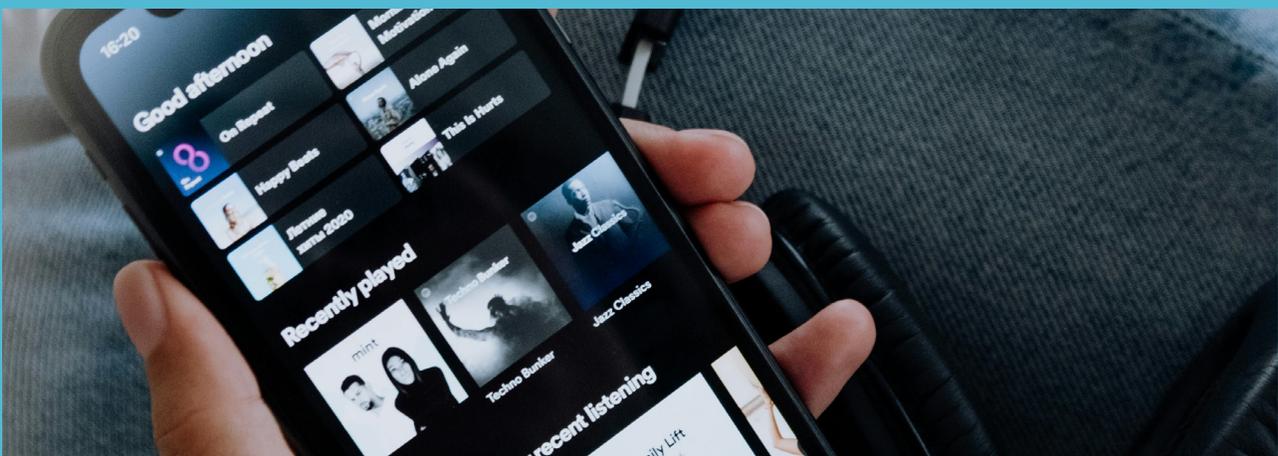
# 3. PLAN FOR RELEASE

## ✔ SET YOUR RELEASE DATE

Decide when your music should go live! Set a release date at least four to six weeks out to provide sufficient time for inspection and distribution — as well as time for promotion!

[LEARN MORE ABOUT SETTING RELEASE DATES](#) →

## SET YOUR RELEASE DATE 4-6 WEEKS OUT!

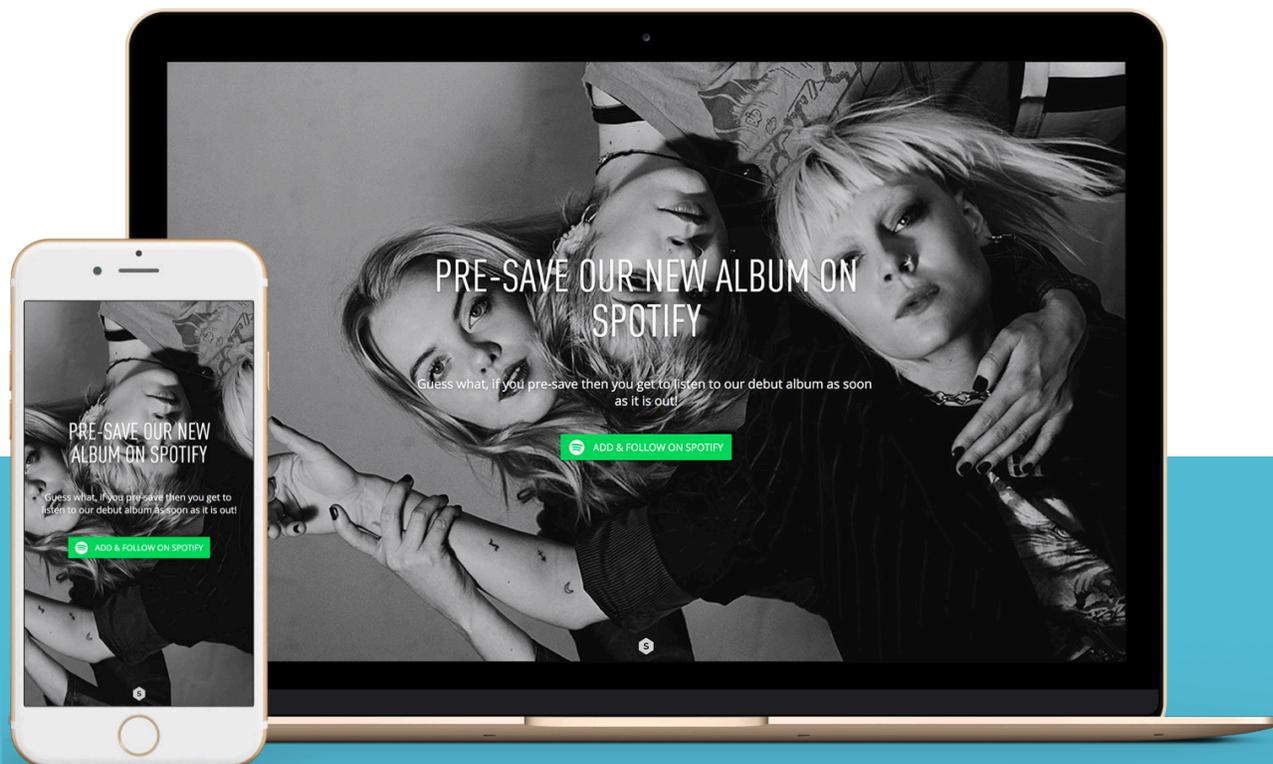


## 3. PLAN FOR RELEASE

### ✔ SET UP PRE-SALES AND PRE-SAVES

You may want to allow your fans to save your music ahead of its release. Building pre-saves or pre-adds can help guarantee a splash on release day and signify interest in your release to platform algorithms. Provide yourself with sufficient time for promotion and launch your pre-save campaign at least four weeks before your release.

You can set up a pre-save/add campaign for Spotify or Apple Music through Show.co, a suite of marketing tools available for free to CD Baby artists.



[LEARN MORE ABOUT SHOW.CO](#) →

## 3. PLAN FOR RELEASE



### ARTIST BIO & HIGHLIGHTS

Your upcoming release is a prime opportunity to gain new listeners. If a new listener loves your release, they might want to know more about you! Consider making a list of your career highlights, accomplishments, and inspirations to draw from as you update your social media profiles and your electronic press kit (EPK).

What should new fans and industry professionals know about you?

**Here are some tips to get you started brainstorming:**

#### RECENT CONCERTS

(Notable sales, opening slots, tours, festivals, etc.)

#### POSITIVE REVIEWS

(press quotes or review scores)

#### BIG SYNC OR PLAYLIST PLACEMENTS

#### COLLABORATORS OF NOTE

#### STREAMING METRICS

#### MUSICAL INSPIRATIONS

**LEARN MORE ABOUT EPKs** [→](#)



# 3. PLAN FOR RELEASE

## ✔ PAYMENT METHOD SETUP

### To get paid, you'll need:

- Preferred payout method (PayPal, direct deposit, Payoneer)
- Tax ID (SSN, EIN, FTIN)
- Tax form (W9 for U.S. artists, W8-BEN for non-U.S.)

## ✔ LABEL & COPYRIGHT OWNERSHIP

As a final step in your submission process, you'll need to include information about copyright ownership and any associated label.

If you funded your recording or created your music on your own without a label, you are the label! If you're submitting through CD Baby, you can leave the label entry blank.

If another person is claiming ownership of the sound recording, they should be listed as the label and copyright owner.

- **Label** = Who funded the release
- **Copyright Owner** = Who owns the master recording
- If you're independent, you're both the label and copyright owner.

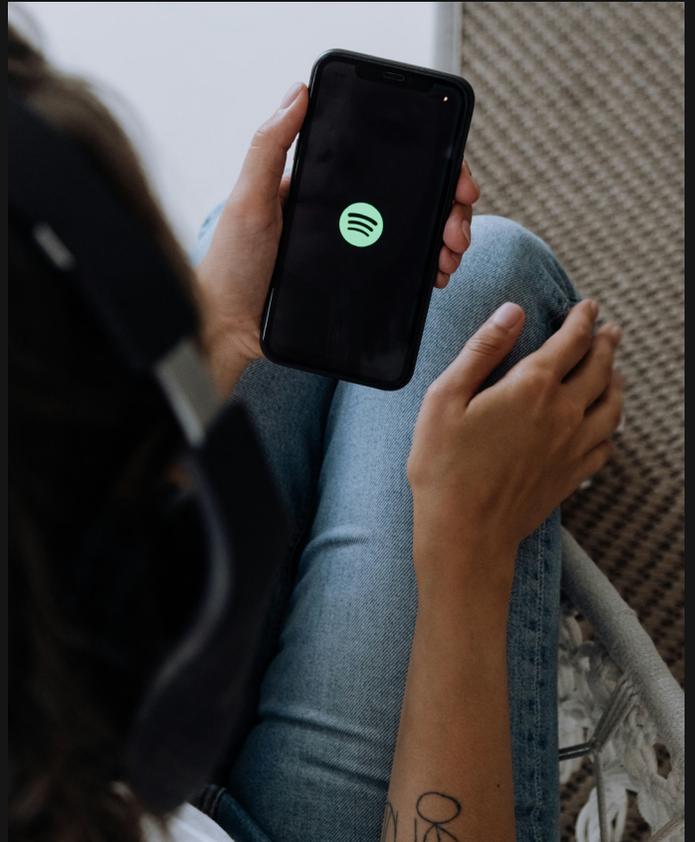
Get clarity on copyright ownership and label involvement ahead of your release! Don't risk delaying your release with discussions over ownership. Discuss with producers, co-writers, or beatmakers ahead of submission.

CONCLUSION

# NOW YOU'RE READY TO BEGIN YOUR SUBMISSION FOR DISTRIBUTION!

Remember, while CD Baby can get your music onto over 150 platforms with a single submission, it's essential that you comply with the rules of major streaming platforms to get your music heard. Take the necessary steps to ensure smooth distribution and enjoy the limitless possibilities of finding new fans.

Thanks for choosing CD Baby. We look forward to your release day!



GET STARTED 