

The latest figures show that digital income makes up 54% of the global music industries revenue and the general consensus is that this percentage is just going to get bigger. This is a brief guide to digital distribution and how to get your music online and available to current and future fans.

Lets Get Digital!

By Alan Holt

Currently there are three types of digital platforms:

- Downloads – such as iTunes, Amazon, Google Play;
- Streaming – such as Spotify, Apple Music, YouTube, Tidal;
- Broadcast / Online Radio – such as iHeartRadio

Many platforms offer more than one type of service e.g. Beatport (a DJ/electronic music focused company) provides both downloads and streaming.

For the bulk of the above platforms you will need to use an aggregator to add your music to their services – the exceptions to this include iHeartRadio and YouTube which you can approach directly with varying degrees of complexity.

Major labels have their own deals with digital services and act as aggregators for the artists signed to them. Locally non-major label aggregators include DRM (Digital Rights Management) and Dunedinmusic.com. There are many overseas aggregators which include TuneCore, The Orchard, Distrokid and CDbaby.

Regardless of where they are based most will upload your music to various platforms, distribute earnings, and provide income statements. Many will also be able to provide metrics on who is listening to your music and where in the planet they were listening.



Choosing an Aggregator

There are two types of aggregators, percentage based and flat fee based.

Percentage based aggregators do not charge a fee to start with but will subtract a percentage of your income prior to paying you. They may also charge you additional fees for processing, with this being subtracted from your payments. It is also common for this type of aggregator to require that you sign with them for a set period of years. Like all business relationships, it is best to fully read and understand the contract before signing, and you may wish to seek legal advice.

Flat fee aggregators like TuneCore and Distrokid do not take a cut from your sales but instead charge you a flat yearly fee. TuneCore is the more expensive of the two companies, charging USD\$29.99 per album. Distrokid is substantially cheaper, charging US\$19.99 a year to upload as much music as you want. The downside of Distrokid in comparison to TuneCore is that they distribute to fewer stores (although they cover all the major ones) and you are unable to selectively release your music into different global territories. For example, you cannot release exclusively in New Zealand & Australia and leave the rest of the world to a label you have licensed the album to – with Distrokid it is an all or nothing situation, and that may not suit your plans.

When choosing an aggregator consider the following:

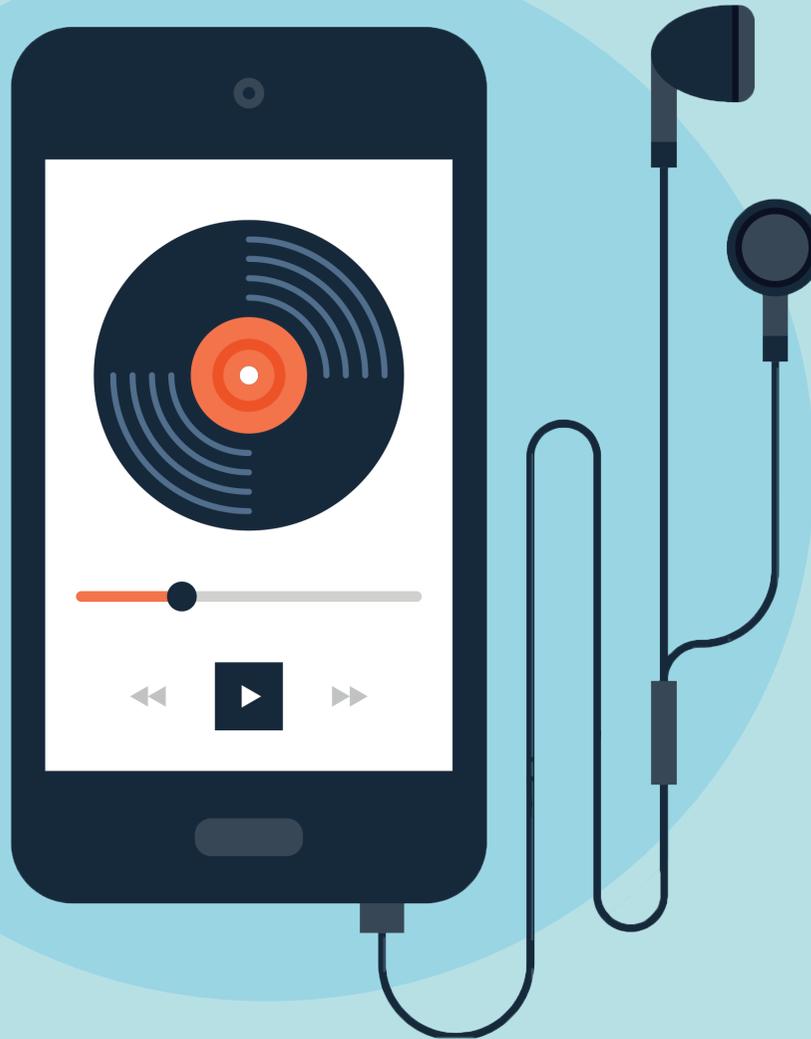
- What stores do you want to be in? Are the larger services like Apple Music, Spotify, Deezer and Tidal enough, or are there specific regions or genre-focused services you need to be in?
- What kind of reporting do you require and does the aggregator provide it?
- If you are signed to a multi-year aggregator contract does that contract allow for you to change the available territories of a release if you license it to a label outside of New Zealand? Will they charge you to do this?
- What territory or territories are you focusing on? If you are primarily focusing on New Zealand, it would be a good idea to sign with a local company as they will have contacts within the local digital industry and potentially get your music added to the front page of iTunes, or added to a local high profile playlist. If you're looking offshore perhaps an offshore-based aggregator is right for you.

YouTube is the largest of all streaming services and also does not require an aggregator. Artists can earn income by allowing advertising placements in and around their videos. You can activate YouTube monetization through the Creator Studio area of your YouTube account page, however there are some eligibility requirements. To be reviewed, all channels need at least 4,000 watch hours in the previous 12 months and 1,000 subscribers. While logged in, click on your icon on the upper right hand corner of the page. This shows the link to the Creator Studio area, which in turn allows you access to the Channel/Monetization area where you will be able to enable the different options for monetization. You will also need to sign up for an AdSense account, which is a simple process that can also be accessed from this page.

A Special Note On Streaming

As of this writing, streaming makes up 54% of global digital revenue and all signs show that this is increasing and we are likely to be heading into a streaming world. The move from downloads and physical media to streaming requires a substantial paradigm shift. With the former, album promotion was focused on the initial sell in – the majority of album sales happened in the first week of release. Also there was no financial impact to the artist if the album was listened to once or a hundred times.

With streaming, income is generated through people playing your music, so the focus now has to be getting them to do so for as long as possible and as often as possible. This means you need to constantly remind the public that you exist. Don't just release your record, play a short tour and then hibernate for a year or two while you consider your next move. You need to keep your profile out there. You can do this by keeping your social media active, releasing videos, releasing special tracks, creating events, going on tour and collaborating with other artists.



Playlists

Another new consideration that streaming has brought to the fore is the importance of playlists. All the big streaming platforms contain both company generated and user generated playlists. Company generated playlists are theme based and generally have a high number of subscribers. Examples of these include 'Alternative R&B', 'The Indie Mixtape' and 'Best New EDM'. All users of streaming platforms are allowed to create and share their own playlists. Some of these can develop a large and active following. Examples of popular user generated playlists include 'Acoustic Lounge', 'I'm An 80's Baby' and 'Chill It Surf Style'.

Getting added to a popular playlist is a great way to both raise your profile and increase your streaming income. Many popular playlists often feed into others, so if you get on one you may find five others quickly follow suit and playlist your tracks as well.

How do you get on playlists?

The straightforward way to get on company generated playlists is through the efforts of your hard-working aggregator. Contact your aggregator and ask them to put forward a particular song for a specific playlist. They will then forward the request on to the provider (Spotify, Apple Music etc), who will then vet the request. Do not get upset if this does not work as naturally enough they are inundated with requests. Please do not hassle your aggregator if you are unsuccessful. They can only ask once per song so repeat hassling will not help. Wait a few months and send a new song request. Always be nice to the aggregator, they are here to help but not to get abused.

The more complex way to get on company generated playlists is to earn a high level of plays through user generated playlists. Songs considered 'hot' on user generated playlists will usually get picked up for company generated playlists. So how do you get on user generated playlists? There are two ways: 1) hire a company to promote your song 2) Contact the playlist owner directly and ask them to add you.

How do I contact a playlist curator?

In one word – Google. Get your detective cap on and Google the owner's name or the name of the playlist. Hopefully they will have a corresponding blog or website that will have contact information. If they have neither, try searching Facebook. Before you make contact make sure you are following their playlist. When you do make contact always remember to be nice.

To keep abreast of what is going on in the ever changing digital landscape, I recommend visiting hypebot.com on a daily basis and subscribe to the daily CMU newsletter <http://www.completemusicupdate.com/signup/>.