

**THE SONGLAB: MUSIC BUSINESS DEJARGONISED**

# **DIGITAL DISTRIBUTION**



**Delivering your songs to the digital  
service platforms**

# UNDERSTANDING DISTRIBUTION IN THE DIGITAL SPHERE

- Distributing your music in the digital sphere has never been as easy as it is right now. However, understanding everything you need to know can sometimes create questions which are difficult to answer so let's try and unpack this subject.
- Artists and labels now have access to a number of different distributors (often referred to as 'digital aggregators') that can open the pathway for any song to the digital service platforms (DSPs) such as Spotify, Apple, Deezer, etc.
- The first thing to try and understand is what your expectation is of a digital distributor as there are some key differences between them.
- Presumably, you would expect your distributor of choice to be able to deliver your song to the DSPs but do you expect anything else outside of that? For instance, would you rather partner with a distributor for the entirety of a large campaign (7 singles, an EP and an album for example) or would you rather partner with a distributor for one song at a time? What kind of analytics would you like to have access to? Would you like your music to be delivered to Tik Tok and Shazam and would you like to have a YouTube Content ID attached to the identity of your recording?
- There are a few key things to think about when distributing your music to the internet so let's look a little deeper at this subject area.

# CONTENT ID

- One of the key considerations when distributing your music in digital form is whether or not you wish to have content IDs attached to the identity of the recording. Not all distributors are capable of doing this. Some distributors can do it for an extra cost and some do it automatically.
- Having a YouTube content ID attached to your song means that YouTube hold a digital footprint of your song's recording. This means that if anyone other than the copyright holder uploads the song to their channel they will receive an email from YouTube stating that they are not the copyright holder. It doesn't count as a "strike" on their account but it does mean that they are unable to monetise the content without your approval. It might sound like a good idea but there are downsides. For instance, let's imagine that you have pitched your new song to some influential taste makers on YouTube. They want to upload your song to share with their audience. The YouTube channel will want to collect the ad revenue of the upload as its their audience. In exchange, you gain access to that audience of brand new fans. If you had a content ID attached, this would not be possible.
- Facebook also uses their own form of content ID and it works in a similar way. However, it's more applicable to live content. Let's imagine that you have asked your distributor to apply a Facebook content ID to your release and a few weeks later once the song is released you do a live stream on the channel of a music promoter where you are singing your song to your backing track. If the channel has not been given copyright approval the live stream will mute after roughly 30 seconds and ruin your live stream.
- There are more and more platforms which are moving towards a Content ID system and there are pro's and con's to it. It is your decision but it is certainly worth thinking about.

# DO YOU WANT A DISTRIBUTOR TO GENERATE YOUR CODES?

- Your digital distributor has the ability to generate some of the key codes associated with a release.
- Your distributor may generate a catalogue code which is unique to their platform.
- It is standard practice for your distributor to generate a UPC code. UPC stands for Unique Product Code. This is the same thing as a barcode which is made up of black and white stripes with a 12 digit code underneath. It is a unique code for each product.
- Your distributor will almost certainly ask you if you want them to generate an ISRC code for you or whether you wish to use your own. ISRC stands for International Standard Recording Code and it acts as a unique reference which is recognised by the collection societies that are linked with the use of your recordings.
- If you are a UK resident and wish to create a your own ISRC code you would need to register as a right holder with PPL UK.

# PANDC

- When processing the administration of your release with your distributor you will be asked for your P year and your C year. The C relates to the copyright of the songwriting and the P relates to the copyright of the sound recording usually known as master rights (see WHAT ARE MASTER RIGHTS doc).
- The C stands for copyright
- The P stands for phonogram.
- A commercial recording needs both of these.
- The P needs to match the year of the release. The C should match the year that the song was composed.



**COPYRIGHT**



**PHONOGRAM**

# SPEED OF DELIVERY AND THE RANGE OF STORES

- Speed of delivery is quite important to many people. Some distributors state it takes them “7-10 days to deliver to Spotify”. Others guarantee a 48 hour delivery.
- What is perhaps even more important here is notification of delivery, especially for Spotify. Once a song is delivered to Spotify, artists can pitch their song to Spotify’s editorial team through the Spotify For Artists platform. If a song is pitched to Spotify at least 7 days prior to its release it is then guaranteed to be on the release radar playlist for anyone that follows the artist. If the song is pitched perhaps 3 or even 4 weeks prior to release it leaves the song more time to be listened to by the domestic editorial team at Spotify. It is therefore important to understand how quickly your song can be delivered and also the notification of that delivery so that you can get your pitch in to editorial playlist consideration in advance.
- We all know that some of the DSPs are the major retailers; Spotify, Apple, Deezer, etc. However, there are also many other stores out there that allow for discovery of new music by many music fans that use them. It is therefore important to consider how many stores your music goes to.
- Perhaps it is a part of your strategy to only have your song on select stores so that your plays are not diluted across too many platforms? Or perhaps you would rather have your music on as many stores as possible. Again, this is something for you to consider.

# DISCOVERING MUSIC

- Surely one of the key things that you might be looking for when releasing music is the visibility of your music to be as wide spread as possible? In which case, there may be some additional options to consider.
- For instance, does your distributor deliver to Tik Tok?
- Does your distributor deliver to Shazam? Think carefully about your strategy here. For instance, let's imagine you release your song and then several months later you get your song placed on a Netflix TV show. Lots of people will hear your song and may want to instantly Shazam it to locate the song so that they can enjoy it again and share it with friends. If your song was not delivered to Shazam when you set up the distribution then this could be an opportunity that is missed as those new fans will have to work much harder to find out what it was. This is a good example of how music can be discovered in one platform and then transferred to another. In this case, Netflix to Spotify.

# TYPE OF CAMPAIGN

- One of the key facets of releasing music is your strategy. Are you dropping single after single on a one at a time basis in waterfall fashion? Or do you want those singles to fall inside of an EP further down the line? Perhaps you wish to set up an eventual album release as part of a longer campaign?
- This must be a consideration when it comes to which distributor you work with because not all of them can achieve this in the way that you would expect so its worth checking with your distributor of choice if this is something that they can actually do and what their protocol is for this process to take place.
- It can often be quite difficult to change between distributors when they are a part of the same wider campaign. For instance, releasing a single with one distributor and a single with a different distributor is perfectly viable. However, if further down the line you wish for those two singles to fall inside the same EP it might become difficult.



# ANALYSIS OF DATA

- One of the key things that a distributor can provide you with is your own analytics. This is a detailed breakdown of your streaming activity. It provides you with data on demographic information of listeners, their country and cities of origin, what devices they're listening on, how often certain songs are being saved and a range of other data.
- Many of the DSPs also have their own version of these analytics that you can use. Examples of this are Spotify For Artists and YouTube Studio.
- Whilst its common practice for digital distributors to provide you with access to your analytics, some are considerably better than others so it is worth researching this area.

# IN IT FOR THE LONG RUN?

- Some digital distributors offer an additional service which is based around growth and scalability.
- For instance, AWAL have a two tier'd system. AWAL and AWAL +. Other distributors are now moving towards this new way of working.
- This allows the distributor to monitor your growth and reward you with benefits of further partnership work, perhaps even funding and mentorship as your career progresses. This tends to work well for artists and distributors that are clearly aligned with a long term partnership between them.
- Not all distributors offer this of course. Many distributors simply offer a paid system that offers a level playing field for all clients regardless of their level of growth and traction.
- It is interesting to note that Universal Music have their own distribution platform called Spin Up. Spin Up offer webspace and distribution to independent artists but this also works as a scouting platform for funnelling talent onto their radar.
- Warner Music acquired the AI generated scouting platform Sodatone in 2016 which alongside We Are Instrumental (another AI driven accounting platform) offer a digital insight to the music industry on the growth of many independent artists regardless of who their distributor is.
- Again, this might be something for you to consider when choosing the right distributor.

# SUMMARY

- **Choosing who you distribute your music through is an important subject matter which requires you to thoroughly draft out your release campaign strategy in advance.**
- **However, it could argued that it doesn't matter hugely and that actually it is far more important to focus on the music and the strategy rather than get overly caught up on who you are aggregating through.**
- **Like anything, there's balance to the thinking.**