

THE SONGLAB: MUSIC BUSINESS DEJARGONISED

HOW TO PITCH SONGS AS A COMMERCIAL SONGWRITER



Knowing what to say and how to say it

WHAT IS A COMMERCIAL SONGWRITER?

- In the eyes of a music publisher a commercial songwriter is a composer who creates songs for commercial opportunities but who doesn't wish to represent the songs as an artist themselves.
- However, there are also many artists who are commercial songwriters.
- Think about your song catalogue and where it naturally splits. For instantly, there may be songs that you deem suitable for you as an artist but then there are the songs that don't feel suitable to you but still hold commercial potential.
- Think carefully about who actually needs songs. For instance, there's very little purpose in writing songs for U2 or Ed Sheeran. They write their own songs. They are self contained artists. Yes they might work with outside collaborators in the form of established writers and producers but they're not looking for outside songs as such.
- However, there are many music publishers, record companies, artists and artist management companies that need songs for acts that do not write their own songs.
- That's where commercial songwriters enter the scene.

SUITABILITY

- Suitability is key to being a commercial songwriter and it works on a number of levels. For instance, what kind of songwriter are you? Perhaps you can do it all but maybe you truly excel in one specific area and you could prove to be very useful to a lot of people by focussing on that one area?
- Maybe you excel at lyric writing? Maybe your skills sit best in the creation of melodies? Maybe you work best when you sit between a producer and an artist? As a commercial songwriter you will advance if you know what you do best, even if you can do it all.
- Then there is the suitability of your main genres. Which genres do you work best in? Are they the same ones that you listen to? Maybe your natural sway is towards RnB? What kind of RnB? The ballad side, the dance side? Go deep into the thinking here. Your creative cognition links to being comfortable with familiarity. Maybe you'd like to expand into different genres? How are you going to do that? Are you willing to listen to songs in a fixed genre consistently in order to study its shape and texture so that you can then write in that style?
- If you are ever in need of third party advice on this subject you can book an online advice clinic session with a SongLab director by emailing jonny@thesonglab.co.uk

RESEARCH

- **Yes I said it - research! This underpins success in many trades and commercial songwriting is no different. Commercial songwriters always need to understand where the latest changes are in the landscape of the commercial markets. It helps to aid the exploitation of songs and music publishers will appreciate it. For example, maybe you've just finished a collaboration and it doesn't quite fit for the artist you were initially targeting it for but you've been researching the Chinese market and you are aware that the type of song you've created is ideal for their that territory. You pitch it, you get the cut, you get the kudos, you get the money and your stock rises all because you were willing to research markets outside of the comfortability of your casual listening habits.**
- **There is a big wide world out there and there are many opportunities every single day for songs.**
- **Don't over look the small territories, they are crucial to building your reputation. A hit in a small country, is still a hit.**

SONG PRESENTATION

- The presentation and production of a song is more important now than it has ever been before because there is no excuse for scratchy demos due to the advancements of portable technology and software.
- How you present your song will very much dictate its potential.
- If you are pitching a song for a female vocalist be sure there's a female vocalist singing the song in the style of the artist you're pitching to.
- If you're presenting an EDM song be sure to make it sound like current EDM. This is not a pitch of what a song could be, it's a pitch of what the song is.
- More often than not, labels are looking to license the productions that come with songs rather than re-record them. That's something which has changed significantly in recent years. (see **WHAT ARE MASTER RIGHTS** doc).
- Be sure that you know what your splits look like in terms of the song copyright and the ownership of the masters. You will be asked for this so it's much better to know what those splits look like before you pitch it. (see **SONG SPLITS** doc).

HOW TO PITCH

- In most cases, the preferred method of communication here is email. Your email does not need to be long. It must be informative and concise but it also must be polite and business like.
- Try to use the persons name you are contacting. People like that. Tell them why you're getting in touch. Tell them you have a song, tell them its suitability on genre and territory and inform them of what the splits are on the copyright so that they can see what they're dealing with if they're a music publisher. Send either an MP3 or a link to a song. Don't send a biog. You would if you were an artist but in this case you're pitching as a commercial songwriter so its not necessary.
- Try and do the hard work for them. If you ask them what they think to where the song could fit, you're asking them for their time and they don't owe you anything. They're not there to help you. It's a business so explain the ideal placement for the song even if its somewhat generic. It instantly tells the potential client that they're dealing with someone who understands what they're doing.
- Be polite and don't chase for responses.

WHERE TO PITCH

- **Some research online will help you here and you have many options.**
- **It usually starts by paying a subscription service that will generate leads from artists and labels. Services such as SongLink International, Taxi Music, Music Xray and others will get you onto the right path to begin with.**
- **By examining the leads from these type of organisations, you will start to pick up on the patterns in trends and this will help to inform you of the type of songs you could create.**
- **As you progress you'll start to get leads sent to you from the database that you naturally build around you.**
- **It is advisable to start working with different music publishers on a song by song basis by signing Single Song Agreements (SSA). This will widen your reach and start your partnership work. Music Publishers will usually expect you to assign your song copyright to them for a set amount of time in return for their time and services. (See WHAT IS MUSIC PUBLISHING doc for more on this).**

WHAT ELSE MUST YOU DO?

- You need to network. The best commercial songwriters are those that find their own opportunities even if they are signed to a major music publisher.
- Artists are vehicles for songs. Work with artists. Cowrite with them. Work with producers and cowrite with them.
- Get on songwriting camps and travel and meet like minded people. If you can't afford the trips, look into funding options. Check the funding wizard on the Help Musicians website. There are lots of arts organisations out there that like to fund international travel for independent creatives. This could be the key to you travelling to other countries, building your reputation and earning a living as a commercial songwriter.
- Do not stop learning. There is always something to learn. There are new techniques to adjust to, there are new vocabularies in use and there are new hybrid genres being created all the time. Try to witness what is bubbling up in the underground so you are ready for when it moves to the mainstream. This is especially true in the UK.

SUMMARY

- **Being a commercial songwriter is often a very popular career route. It can run alongside other creative projects such as being an artist or being a producer.**
- **You could be adding immense value to other creatives and other business colleagues by entering into this world.**
- **Its about working out how you work best and tapping into your capabilities. That works on a creative level and a business level.**
- **Being multifaceted is a prerequisite.**