

THE SONGLAB: MUSIC BUSINESS DEJARGONISED

THE SPOTIFY ALGORITHM



**Understanding the how to gain visibility on
the world's leading audio streaming platform**

OVERVIEW

- Spotify is the world's leading audio streaming platform with deep discovery tools available to its listener base.
- It can connect music content to a wide demographic of listeners by understanding who those listeners are and what they like to listen to.
- The algorithm Spotify uses is key to building an audience through its various options of exposure and discovery.
- There is no sustainable way of hacking the algorithm. It is instead about feeding the algorithm to gain visibility.
- Visibility can be achieved with great music and a solid understanding of how to let the algorithm work for you.
- The key thing that underpins this is Spotify understanding your target audience. It is then that the algorithm starts to work in your favour.

CLAIM YOUR PROFILE

- It starts by claiming your profile which gives you a blue tick verified status. This can only be achieved once you have a track that is live on Spotify.
- Your identification will be verified and you can then gain access the back engine of Spotify which is called Spotify For Artists.
- This gives you access to a wide array of analytics which relate to your music and its streaming performance. You will be able to understand the type of people who are listening to you, what cities and countries they're based in, how often they're saving your track and viewing your canvases, what else they listen to and what playlists your music is on amongst a host of other metrics.
- Be sure to check out the desktop version and not just the app version as the former has a much more detailed overview of your analytics.
- You will also have the ability to pitch your song to the editorial teams at Spotify. This can only be done before your track is released. Once it's live, the chance is gone. If you pitch your track at least 7 days prior to your release then it means that anyone that follows you will get your song on their release radar playlist which updates every Friday.

THE ALGORITHM PART 1: NLP

- Natural Language Processing (NLP) is a huge part of many different algorithms and it is an integral part of Spotify's.
- Spotify's artificial intelligence scans a song's metadata. This is the data that you send with the song. Spotify have it from your distributor when you sent it to them and they also have it from the pitch you made to their editorial team. The key elements are genre, mood, vibe and your primary and secondary genres. If you put the wrong genre or mood in you're already failing to feed Spotify the data they need on you.
- Spotify's NLP also scans the internet looking for text that it can associate with your music. This is why blog features and editorial features are important as it feeds further data on your music straight to their algorithm. It will also look for news items on you, what people are saying about you on forums and what other artists are being mentioned alongside you. You informing music publications of your similar artists and primary genres along with descriptive text as to the role your song plays in crucial to discovery. (See DIY PRESS RELEASE doc)
- Spotify's NLP looks for descriptive terms, paradigmatic analysis and keywords which are then categorised into cultural vectors and top terms. This is also linked to the language that your song's lyrics are in. This is algorithms you're dealing with not people, so don't assume it will know the basic things. You need to tell it what to do for you.
- A web presence is key in gaining visibility on Spotify. Spotify want to see what else you're doing to promote your music outside of their platform.

THE ALGORITHM PART 2: COLLABORATIVE FILTERING

- Many emerging artists don't like to be put into boxes and typecast into a specific genre but here is the grown up truth ; you have to be. Well, initially at least, in order to gain visibility.
- Spotify are not going to offer the introduction of your music to new fans that they think will like you until they have a good understanding of who your audience is. They not you, will form that audience and then compare that data against fans of other acts. This is the key facet which underpins growth on Spotify and its known as collaborative filtering.
- In its simplest form, 93% of fans of Band X are also 78% of fans of Band Y and therefore the algorithm predicts that a large proportion of that audience will enjoy the music of Band Z (based on similar fans and NLP research) so they will put Band Z's new track on the discover weekly playlist of fans of Band X and Band Y. They'll start small to lower their risk by offering Band Z's music to a handful of listeners. They will asses the skip and save rate and this rapid form of retention and engagement informs them of suitability.
- Good quality music tends to survive this form of market research and it informs Spotify of further crowd sourced data on their listener base.
- If the retention rate is deemed both successful and suitable the algorithm increases the size of the audience that it plugs your music into through its algorithmic playlists.

THE ALGORITHM PART 3: RAW AUDIO ANALYSIS

- Once Spotify gains a solid understanding of who your audience is, it will populate your Fans Also Like section. This is predominately achieved through Parts 1 and 2.
- Part 3 is analysis of the audio itself. Have you ever looked at the shape of a waveform of a song? It is surprising how much you can tell about a song and its genre by doing so.
- The waveform of a song is rather like a digital fingerprint and much like a human's finger print it needs to align with identity to find success and transparency.
- Now let's think back to the metadata that you sent to your distributor (see **DIGITAL DISTRIBUTION** doc). Did you inform your distributor of the most accurate primary and secondary genres for your song? If you got this wrong and Spotify's algorithm suggests that your song fits into a different style you are restricting the song's chances of survival.
- Consider playing your songs to a few people that you trust. Ask them for the most suitable genre and mood associated with the song. Knowing this is crucial for digital discovery and for the sync market for that matter! (see **THE SYNC BUSINESS** doc).

PLAYLISTS EXPLAINED

- There are three types of playlists that Spotify use and they all play an important role in discovery. Spotify's algorithm is built around the flow of new music after all.
- There are user curated playlists which can be curated by anyone. These can range from privately curated and socially shared to artist driven forms of marketing to hugely influential third party curators with a large audience.
- Then there are the editorial playlists which are part algorithmic and part human curation. They are all based around mood, feel and genre and are hugely influential in terms of discovery. Some are more influential than others (Rap Cavier, Happy Hits) and others hold domestic identity with wide appeal (Made In Manchester, Viral Rio De Janeiro). Many countries have their own domestic editorial teams who edit and pick the playlists and spend immense amounts of time ensuring the ease and flow of a listeners experience.
- Then there are the algorithmic playlists. Discover Weekly is a 25 song weekly mix tape which is custom made for every unique listener every Monday morning. Release Radar is another form of algorithmic playlist which is unique to each listener is released every Friday morning. Then there are the others; On Repeat, Summer Rewind, Daily Playlists, Top Songs of The Year, etc. All of these playlists are brimming with crowd sourced sent by listeners to Spotify which tells Spotify what to serve to the listener next. They don't always get it right of course but the more data you send the closer they get to the truth.
- Have you ever noticed that there is a song in your release radar that you love but its not an artist you've heard of? What about that song you like thats in your Summer Rewind but that wasn't in your summer in the first place? Thats the algorithms at work sending you what they think you'll like based on what you already like.

ORGANIC GROWTH EXPLAINED

- Spotify recognises artists that release singles regularly (regularly could be loosely defined at 6 singles per calendar year). Regular releases fall inline with Spotify's natural algorithmic design ; the flow of new music being introduced to its listener base.
- However, like most things there is balance. After releasing a few singles, it is important to identify your lead single. This is the song that has the best metrics (highest save rate and highest listener to stream ratio). This song may not necessarily be what YOU consider to be your best song so your judgement may be blinded.
- Take this lead single and work it harder into playlists by pitching it to curators. The Spotify Indie Bible and such other such publications and platforms can be of great help here. Your pitch to the these 3rd party curators is strong because the song has already build some traction. The more traction you gain on that song the better the rest of your catalogue will grow because Spotify will be using that lead single to assess further data on who is listening to you and who else they think would like you.
- Try to not think about your old songs as being old. Spotify don't see old and new in the way that you do. They see tested and untested. Working your older songs will give new data and new growth and visibility to your newer songs.

SUMMARY

- Spotify is an un-ignorable monster. It is the most commonly used paid platform and the ultimate discovery tool for new music. Try and feed it the data it needs to read on you.
- It only takes one song for you to gain huge visibility. Once you “work it” the platform will start to work for you.