

MusicNSW's Industry Essentials

How to share your release with the world

Prepared by GYROstream for MusicNSW

Did you know more than 22,000 songs are uploaded to streaming services *every day*? Getting your music online can seem like a complicated task. It doesn't have to be though. Below are some tips and tricks to help you navigate the best distribution path for you and your new tunes.

What are digital music aggregators / distributors?

Digital aggregators (also known as digital distributors) are companies that provide a means to distribute your music globally through digital music stores and streaming platforms. You can't just upload a track directly to Spotify or Apple Music and have it streamed globally, you need to use a digital music aggregator. If you're signed to a label, it's more than likely they'll distribute your music to Spotify, Apple, iTunes, YouTube Music and more for you, but if you're independent, you can have exactly the same access to these platforms by using a digital aggregator.

Aggregators make their money by charging upfront fees and/or charging a percentage of revenue earned from the streaming and download purchases of your music. In some cases, aggregators will also charge an ongoing annual fee to keep your content online.

Who do they distribute to?

Nearly all distributors will get your music to Apple, Spotify, Deezer, Youtube (ie. the major western platforms), which together cover a large portion of music listeners worldwide. Where things might differ is for the highly localised services that cater to their specific regions - eg. Anghami (Middle East), Claro-Musica (South America), KKBOX (Asia), UMA (Russia), and the biggest emerging market of China - whose five main streaming services cater to 500 million monthly listeners. Check whether your distributor can reach these markets. Some distributors also deliver to niche genre stores (eg. Beatport for electronic music), which have stringent rules on the type of music they accept.

Which aggregators are out there and how do I choose which one is best for me?

The first thing you need to know is that it's not a one size fits all model. The best option might change for you over time and what might work for you at the beginning of your project may be different to what works for you later. Spend some time researching different aggregators to find out which one fits your needs best.

Things to look for when you're researching:

- **Term** - How long is the contract for? Will there be penalties if you remove your music from the service early?
- **Fees** - What are they, and are there any additional charges or upsells from what they advertise upfront?
- **Rights** - What's covered and what might you be liable for? Understanding the difference between the sound recording and mechanical rights is really important. If you're planning to stay completely independent, it's worth making sure the digital aggregator you choose lets you keep 100% of your copyright.
- **Publishing and synchronisation** - Is your aggregator asking you to give them sync rights, and if so, what benefits are they offering you in return? Is the deal exclusive aka are you able to sync your catalogue elsewhere?
- **Where will your music be sent?** Some aggregators only send to a few stores, some send to over 100. Can they reach places like China to access those emerging markets?
- **Delivery time** - Always find out how long it's going to take before your music appears on digital music services. For best practice, it's always good to upload and set up your distribution at least two weeks out from your release day. Some distributors require even more time.
- **'PRO' services** - some digital distributors (eg. Tunecore/CD Baby) offer a 'PRO' tier - which stands for 'Performing Rights Organisation' to collect your publishing royalties. Talk to APRA *before* you sign up with any of these PRO services - you might find APRA can collect these for you without giving up a large chunk of your royalties in commission.
- **Monetizing content** - Most distributors can now monetise user-generated content on Youtube (via Youtube Content ID), and others are now offering a similar feature to monetise content on Facebook. Check what your distributor can offer in this regard.

So, what are some aggregators and what do they offer?

Below is a quick list of some of the major aggregators you might come across as an artist in Australia. These are just a few distributors you can access and it's important to remember every distributor is different so make sure you do your homework. Most importantly, you should ALWAYS read the aggregator terms and conditions before you upload.

GYROstream

HEADQUARTERS: Australia

www.gyrostream.com

- GYROstream is an Australian made, Australian owned digital aggregator. Being Australian based you know you're going to be able to contact someone during business hours if you make a mistake or need help with your upload.
- They offer a bunch of additional music services including PR, playlist plugging, insurance, grant writing and vinyl and CD production.
- GYROstream is one of the only independent distributors to distribute to all of the main streaming services in China. Their distribution channels can get your music to every continent apart from Antarctica.
- ARIA Chart registration is free.
- You keep all of your copyright 100%.
- Opt-in sync service available for placement in other commercial opportunities. And it's non-exclusive.
- Free barcodes (UPCs) & ISRC codes.
- YouTube monetization.
- GYROstream costs \$9.99 per release per year. The company also takes 8% commission on your streaming revenue.
- You can cancel anytime, no lock-in contracts.
- Ability to archive and download your songs. GYROstream stores everything in the cloud. And if you need to download the WAV file of your song because your hard drive crashed or something, you can log into your account and download it.

CD Baby

HEADQUARTERS: USA

www.cdbaby.com

- One of the original digital aggregators - been around for 20 years.
- No yearly fees. You pay once, your music is up forever no matter what.
- 9% commission and approx. \$60 AUD to upload an album.
- They charge \$5 for a single UPC or \$20 for an album UPC. These aren't optional add-ons. You can't distribute your album without a UPC - so add on an additional \$5/20 for each release.
- Fulfillment and an e-commerce store for CD and vinyl.

- Sync licensing possibilities (for select artists).
- High YouTube commission (30%).
- Detailed analytics and sales reports.
- No mechanisms in place to help artists who start to catch (marketing support, playlist plugging, etc).
- Lots of add-ons available through their sister companies and partners
- Speak to APRA before signing up with any 'PRO' publishing account.

Tunecore

HEADQUARTERS: New York, USA

www.tunecore.com.au

- No commission. You keep 100% of your royalties with an approx. \$40 AUD upload fee per album, increasing to \$65 for year two and beyond.
- Be careful of hidden costs. They charge a fee for new outlets and for adding pre-orders.
- Speak to APRA before signing up with any 'Tunecore Publishing' account
- Detailed revenue and analytics reports.
- No mechanisms in place to help artists who start to catch (marketing support, playlist plugging, etc).
- Been around a long time and a very stable platform, though all tech support is offshore.

Distrokid

HEADQUARTERS: USA

www.distrokid.com

- No commission. You keep 100% of the revenue.
- Unlimited songs for one yearly subscription price.
- Payment splitting.
- Single page signup and simple to navigate and set up tracks.
- Ability to download the songs. DK stores everything in the cloud.
- \$.99/year per song for Shazam - this is free with all other services and it isn't disclosed up front that this is not included for the yearly price. If you distribute an album of 10 songs, it will cost you an additional \$10/yr for that album just for Shazam.
- Lots of extra fees not disclosed up front or in the FAQ (like YouTube collection (\$5/yr per single), Store Maximizer (\$8/yr per release), Leave a Legacy (\$29 one time, per release, Shazam (\$1/yr/song), which are free with other services.
- Lowest pricing tier has restrictions (can't set release date, copyright line, label name, preorders or view analytics). Need to be on the mid-tier price to get access to these features - approx \$50 AUD per year.
- No mechanisms in place to help artists who start to catch (marketing support, playlist plugging, etc).

- Great at delivering tracks to stores quickly but a smaller list of music platforms than some other distributors.

Amuse

HEADQUARTERS: USA

www.amuse.io

- No fees.
- No commission. You keep 100% of the revenue.
- No desktop app - only mobile phone app.
- Extremely data driven/focused.
- Give advances (for signed artists).
- Pay for marketing (for signed artists).
- Can upstream to a 50/50 (not 360) label agreement.
- New and unproven. If they lose their investors, their entire company folds.

Ditto Music

HEADQUARTERS: Liverpool, UK

www.dittomusic.com

- No commission. You keep 100% of the revenue.
- Unlimited songs for an ongoing yearly price.
- Upsells are expensive including \$50 AUD for ARIA chart registration and \$60 for an iTunes pre-order.
- Local artist relations team based in Melbourne.
- Offer some expanded services like PR/Playlisting (select artists only).

AWAL/ Believe Digital/ The Orchard/ Stem/ MGM

- Unlike any of the other services listed here, you need to apply and be 'accepted' to these services before you can distribute through them.
- No fees to upload, however, they generally take a 15%-25% commission on your tracks and you need to earn a certain amount before you get paid. Sometimes that could be up to \$60.
- Some of these services have lock-in contracts and sign you up for publishing as part of the deal and you could be locked in for a period of time, so it's always good to read the terms and conditions before you accept any offers.
- Some of these services are owned by large record labels or publishing organisations so their websites and analytics are more advanced.

What do you need to prepare for digital distribution through an aggregator?

1. Decide your release date.
For best results with your release, you'll need to upload it a minimum of two weeks before release date. If your distributor is doing some playlist pitching/plugging for you, you'll need to have a plan ready for promotion. Some streaming services take several days to ingest your songs, and with new features such as Spotify's editorial pitching platform, it's best practice to pitch at least a week from release date - so you need to have your music uploaded long before this. Be aware of all the deadlines to hit your release date.
2. Prepare your files and metadata.
To distribute your music via an aggregator you need 3 things - 1. Audio, 2. Cover Art, 3. Metadata (often called 'label copy'). The data you need to provide are things like release date, artist name, release title, copyright information, label name etc. Most distributors make it easy to walk through each data field step-by-step. Your audio will need to be an uncompressed digital file (eg .WAV file), and your artwork should be square and as high resolution as possible.

What other online services are there to share your music and what rights do you obtain?

Soundcloud - Soundcloud still allow artists to upload direct to their service without an aggregator, but they have now added a subscription tier to allow artists to earn royalties. Many distributors can now deliver to the monetised Soundcloud service so check with your distributor if you can take advantage of this feature. Even on the free tier, you could be earning advertising revenue.

Bandcamp - Bandcamp allows users to sell downloads and merch from their artist page. Bandcamp take 15% sales commission from any sale.

triple j Unearthed - most Aussie independent artists will upload to the triple j unearthed page. This can be great for local exposure and a chance at getting your song on the radio, but be aware that artists do not get paid for any music that is streamed or downloaded from the site.

Blockchain services - The next evolution of music payments - some brand new services allow artists to upload music for download/streaming and get paid in crypto-style tokens and also create smart contracts with your musical contributors so they share in any royalties. Read the terms carefully as to how they monetise and pay royalties and whether you can cash out any of the 'tokens'. Most of these services are start-ups in the early stages of development.

Preparing a Release Plan

So you've just received the final audio master of your new track! Yes!
The worst thing you can do is rush this out to digital stores without putting together a comprehensive release plan - you only get one shot at making an impact!

You need to start implementing your plan at least 2 months (8 Weeks) from your release date:

1. **Set goals** - Write down what you want to achieve out of the release - be specific - make a hit list of blogs, media, radio, touring/gigs, that you want to target to promote your release. Define your own success.
2. **Get your assets in order** - Press image, cover art, mastered audio files, cover images for all the different social media platforms. Think about what message or story to convey around the release and write a bio including these themes. Put all your assets in a Dropbox or Google Drive folder so that it's all in one place and can be quickly shared.
3. **Set up a schedule** for your social media content so you know what you're posting, when you're posting it, and what content you need to create between now and your release date. Start teasing your release to your fans to build hype. The more content you can create early will save heaps of time closer to your release date when things get hectic.
4. **Decide on a release date** and make sure you have uploaded to your distributor at least 2-3 weeks in advance of this date to make sure it will get to all music platforms on time.
5. **Social media** - Make sure all your social media profiles, including your Spotify and Apple profiles (if you have them), are complete and consistent. Sign up for [Spotify for Artists](#) and [Apple for Artists](#).
6. **Press** - Reach out to bloggers, community radio, playlist curators, and anyone else who can promote your music, share a private Soundcloud link of your single to get feedback and provide information on your release plan. Network as much as possible.
7. **Airt** - Upload your music to [AMRAP's Airt](#) platform to send your songs to over 300 community radio stations. Reach out to individual radio DJ's in your genre and introduce yourself and share your single.
8. **Share your song** EVERYWHERE on release day, and good luck!

Physical distribution - what are your options and are they right for you?

Physical music sales accounted for 25% of total music revenue in 2017 in Australia, still forming an important part of recorded music income. As retailers begin to cut down their shelf space for physical products (Kmart have now stopped selling CDs altogether) this will continue to decline in coming years.

For independent artists, some national distributors like MGM are still an option. However, due to the high cost of manufacture, artists need to think about whether producing physical music products is a worthwhile investment. Touring can still be a great opportunity to sell CDs and vinyl direct to fans.

Think about the style of music you make and whether your fans are keen to buy physical formats - CDs are still popular in the country music scene and many genres are making the most of the vinyl revival that can be profitable for indie artists. For a small run of 200 vinyl, there is good margin to be made if you are hitting the road and have the opportunity to market the products to your fans. As it can be a considerable investment ensure you have a strategy to sell through stock so you can make a profit on the production costs.

Other Tips And Tricks

- **Spotify algorithms** - Some of Spotify's playlists are now curated by algorithms that monitor an artists popularity trends. Getting as many people as possible to 'follow' your Spotify profile after release date and interact with you online helps 'feed' the algorithm giving you a greater chance of playlist inclusion.
- **Think global** - There are hundreds of millions of active music listeners in the world. Your biggest fans could be in Dubai, Stockholm, Brazil, London, or even Tokyo. Whilst it's important to focus on your local market for touring, PR, or radio, your streaming income can come from all corners of the globe.
- **Data** - Take advantage of all the data from Spotify for Artists / Apple for Artists. Know which songs your fans listen to most, where they come from, and their detailed demographics, so you can create content that engages them and keeps them coming back to your music. It's never been easier to understand your audience.
- **Release strategy** - Get creative with your release cycle. Releasing two singles then an album might work for major label acts, but think about how you can tailor your release strategy to energise your fans and build a new audience. The ease of digital distribution combined with streaming has re-written the rule book on what is possible during the release cycle.

Helpful Links

- [GYROstream](#) - Australian Digital Aggregator / Distributor
- [AMRAP / Airt](#)
- [APRA/AMCOS](#)
- [MusicNSW](#)
- [Submithub](#)
- [SmartURL](#) - for Spotify Pre-saves and smart links to your music
- [Spotify For Artists](#)
- [Apple For Artists](#)
- [Hootsuite](#) - for scheduling social media posts across all your social channels
- [Soundsgood.co](#) - create artist playlists synced across multiple platforms
- [Follow](#) button on Spotify - generate your own follow button to embed in other sites
- [Zimril Music](#) - Australian based music blockchain start-up