



OFF THE RECORD

Guide to Distribution

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EmuBands

Introduction

Distribution is probably the least exciting part of releasing music but picking a distribution partner is one of the most important decisions you'll make. A good distributor will play an essential part in the success of your release – they are key to maximising your reach, and depending on the deal you have, will have an impact on your financial return. Before looking at the different pricing models each distributor offers in return for their service, it is important to ensure that you pick a distributor who can offer:

- On-going support, and are easy to get in touch with
- Scheduled release dates
- Pre-saves and pre-orders
- URL links in advance of your release date
- Detailed royalty reports
- Playlist Pitching

The six points above are fundamental to running a successful campaign.

Pricing Models: Picking a Distributor

In term of pricing models, there's three main ways that a distributor can charge for their services. Some employ a mix of 2 of these options;

Annual Subscription

The subscription model works by paying your distributor an annual fee in return for distributing your music. This generally means a lower up-front cost than a flat fee model, but it also means you're effectively tied in to paying the distributor for as long as you wish your music to be available online; if you stop paying the annual subscription fee, your music will be removed from digital services.

If you decide that a subscription model suits your needs best, make sure that the distributor offering their service in return for an annual payment isn't also taking a cut of your royalties, unless you feel they are truly adding value to deserve this.

Royalty Share

Royalty based deals are common; this usually involves a low or no up-front fee from the artist/label to the distributor, and the distributor makes money by taking a percentage of the artist or label's earnings from the sale / stream of their music. The percentage that the distributor takes is typically between 5-25%. Despite what some distributors in this space may say, they are not offering their

services to you 'for free'. If they are taking between 5-25% of your earnings, ensure that you know what they are offering you in return for this.

If you have a track which gets added to a few playlists, or does particularly well, the amount you pay a royalty-share distributor from your earnings can end up being a lot more than you would pay a flat fee distributor.

Flat Fee

A flat fee model is exactly what it sounds like; you pay a one-time fee per release to the distributor and they'll distribute your release in return. Typically, the flat fee you pay is slightly higher than the annual subscription payments charged by subscription model distributors, but as the fee is one-off, you tend to save money as the years go by. Your releases will remain on digital services for as long as you wish, with no risk of them being removed by your distributor because of a missed subscription payment.

This payment model is attractive because it is the most transparent, and if you pick the right distributor in this space, you're unlikely to encounter any nasty surprises.

With EmuBands, you pay a one-time fee per release. For any extra services, we offer optional subscription tiers, but these subscription payments aren't related to your distribution fees, so your music would remain live for as long as you wish, even if you decided you didn't want to keep paying annually for extra services.

Best Practices

Once you've picked your distributor, employ the following best practices to ensure your release is distributed smoothly and in time for your release date;

Compile your assets

Check out the FAQ section of your distributor's website: what formats do they require for your audio and artwork?

Because the file formats are set by digital services, most distributors require the same formats. Audio files need to be in WAV format, 16-bit (or higher), and front-cover artwork needs to be in JPG format, 3000x3000 pixels, 300 dpi.

The third 'asset' after audio & artwork, is called metadata. Metadata, put simply, is the text-based information for your release. Release title, track titles, artist name, release date, composer names, etc. You might find it useful to have all of your metadata already spell checked and sitting in a word document or spreadsheet when you go to upload your release to the distributor. Copying and pasting the information will cut down on any chances of mistakes being made. Distributors typically require the full names of the composers (not just the band name), so bear this in mind when adding your release.

Plan your release strategy

Are you planning on releasing an EP or album? You should consider the Waterfall release strategy.

A waterfall release strategy is when an EP or album has the appearance of being released gradually, with one track added at a time until the full release is made available when the final track is added.

In practice, a waterfall release is actually a series of independent releases, with each release distributed separately; it is not actually one release having tracks added to it (as that's not possible), but a series of different products being released over a period of time.

This is particularly useful on Spotify, as it allows the "latest release" on the artist page to be replaced by multiple releases over time as more tracks get released. Because of track-linking, if the same WAV recordings / ISRCs for the previously released tracks are used on each new product, the stream counts will transfer over to each new version of your release as it appears on Spotify, meaning your play-counts across all versions count towards your overall stream count.

It also means each time you releases a new single, you are guaranteeing more streams for the previously released singles, as they'll automatically play after fans check out the newest track if they click through to the newest release.

Furthermore, given that via Spotify for Artists, you're only able to pitch 1 track from a forthcoming release – in utilising this Waterfall Release method, you can maximise the amount of tracks you can pitch to Spotify's editors for potential playlist inclusion. 3 releases means 3 tracks being submitted for editorial review, vs. 1 release with 3 tracks; you can only pitch 1 of these tracks for consideration by the editorial team.

You can learn more about Waterfalling here: <https://www.emubands.com/faqs/waterfall-releases/>

You should also think about platforms like TikTok. Fans are only able to access 60 seconds of your track through TikTok, so if you have a preferred 60 second section of the song you'd like to play, speak to your distributor about this so they can help you set it up.

Add your release at least a few weeks before your release date

Try to add your release to your distributor's website at least a few weeks before your release date. Not only will this give your distributor enough time to process the release and discuss anything with you; for example if there's a problem with your audio / artwork, or they need to check another aspect of the release with you, but it'll also ensure that you have enough time to pitch your release to the editorial teams at digital services.

If you're thinking of pitching, speak to your distributor about their own guidance, but we would generally recommend adding the release at least 4-6 weeks in advance of your release date if thinking about this.

Playlist Pitching

If you use a streaming service to listen to music, chances are you're familiar with the curated playlists those services offer. You've probably discovered an artist or track you love whilst listening to a playlist. To get your own music on these playlists, you need to pitch to the editorial teams. These are the people who pick which tracks end up on curated playlists on streaming services like Apple Music & Spotify and can be hugely beneficial in bringing your music to new audiences.

Through [Spotify for Artists](#), you can pitch your own music directly to the editorial teams at Spotify. Their pitch tool is very easy to use, and since its launch a few years ago, has given hundreds of thousands of independent artists a chance of landing their music on some big playlists, like [New Noise](#) or [Most Necessary](#).

For other digital services, like Apple Music, or Deezer, the channel to pitch to editors typically comes from distributors or record labels, so speak to your distributor (or record label) about this. A good distributor should offer this to you as part of their service. Typically, you'll need to provide your distributor with a one-sheet or press release so they can put together a pitch on your behalf. Ask your distributor what they need; some have a special form for you to fill out which gives them all the information they require.

Timing is absolutely key to pitching; start the conversation with your distributor about pitching as early as possible. 4-6 weeks in advance of your release, earlier than that if possible.

You're unlikely to receive direct feedback from editors after your music is pitched to them. This is because they receive thousands of pitches, so they're unable to give individual feedback to every pitch they receive.

Profile Management

No feedback doesn't mean your music hasn't been picked for inclusion in a playlist, though. The best way to find out if your music is picked for a playlist, is by utilising the different artist toolkits offered by each streaming service. The offerings are all slightly different, but typically they all allow you to access rich insights on who is listening to your music, and whether you've been included any playlists on the service.

The different toolkits:

- [Amazon Music for Artists](#)
- [Apple Music for Artist](#)
- [Deezer for Creators](#)
- [Spotify for Artists](#)

Each toolkit varies in how feature-rich they are. Common features across all include in-depth analytics, such as demographic information, and how fans are discovering & listening to you on the service, and the ability to customise the appearance of your artist page.

Spotify for Artists is probably the best of the lot. You can edit your biography and upload a gallery of images, as well as pitch your music directly to editors via the in-built playlist pitching tool. To get instant access to Spotify for Artists, be sure to work with a distributor on Spotify's Preferred Provider list: <https://artists.spotify.com/providers>

Pre-saves, pre-orders – why are they important?

So, you've uploaded your release, you've pitched your release to editors – there's a few weeks left before your release date. You want to start talking about your release on social media, creating some conversation before its out. A good way of doing this, is by utilising a pre-save / pre-order campaign.

What's the difference?

Pre-order:

A pre-order is a purchase-based action. It needs to be set up by your distributor, so make sure they can support pre-orders. If selected for your release, users are given the option to pre-order your release, so they have it first on your release date. They purchase it as soon as they select to pre-order the release.

Pre-save:

A pre-save works like a pre-order, but for streaming services, rather than download stores. Fans can pre-save your album to ensure it is saved in their libraries as soon as your release goes live.

Why are they important?

Pre-order:

All pre-orders are counted as first day sales when your release date passes, which can be useful for increasing your chances of hitting the charts. You can incentivise fans to pre-order your release by setting up instant gratification tracks.

Pre-save:

This can be useful in driving engagement & fans. It can also help increase follower count, and positively affect algorithms on streaming services which drive personalised playlists. Some pre-save providers allow you to collect fan data.

Both pre-orders and pre-saves give you extra lead-in time to start talking about your release on socials and building conversation around your new unreleased music.

Instant Gratification Pre-Orders

When your release is available for pre-order on iTunes, customers can immediately download instant gratification songs during the album's pre-order period.

Selecting a few tracks to be made available for immediate download during your pre-order period on iTunes can be a great way to encourage your fans to commit to pre-ordering your entire EP or Album before its release date.

To set up instant gratification pre-orders, speak with your account manager/representative at your distributor.

Pre-Saves

- At present, pre-saves are possible on Spotify, Apple Music, Tidal & Deezer.
- Apple Music & Tidal have built-in functionality.
- Note: Apple Music call this 'pre-add' and is activated when a release is available on iTunes for pre-order, with at least 1 instant-gratification track.
- Spotify & Deezer require a third-party solution.

Smart Links

There is a wealth of third-party services providing solutions for pre-saves, geo/device redirection, tracking, and short linking. We like Feature.FM, but there's lots of different services out there.

In addition to being useful for pre-save campaigns, it is important to use a Smart Link service to route fans towards your music post-release date, too. You're able to create a landing page with links to your release across every major service it is available on, and share a single link to this landing page online, rather than having to post individual links to the release on Spotify, Apple Music, Deezer etc. As well as looking neater when you post about the release online, sharing a smart link increases the likelihood of converting your social media followers into listeners by making the experience of finding your music on their preferred service easy and seamless.

Post-release: Royalties

Depending on the distributor you choose, you should expect to see the first royalty reports which are relevant to your release around 4-6 weeks after the month of your release date. Royalties are not reported in real time, and it can take a few months for some services to report sales/streaming royalties to distributors. The royalties your distributor will report & pay to you are for the master recording. If you write your own songs, and own the copyright to them (i.e. you have not assigned the rights to a publisher), then you should register your songs with PRS for Music to ensure you receive any relevant publishing royalties generated from the sale or stream of your music, too.

Summary

For a wider checklist to use whilst comparing different distribution options, we would recommend reading 'Distribution Revolution' – a report created by the Association of Independent Music (AIM) in association with CMU Insights, which seeks to demystify the digital music supply chain in the 21st Century. You can learn more about the report here: bit.ly/distributionrevolution

This guide was written by Toni Malyn, Head of Artist Relations at EmuBands.

EmuBands is the trusted partner of thousands of artists, labels and managers across the world. With supercharged release features and expert support, we provide a low-cost solution to distribute your music, allowing you to retain control of your copyright and keep 100% of your royalties.

Website: www.emubands.com