



MN MUSIC PRODUCTIONS

THE INDEPENDENT ARTIST'S PLAYBOOK

Release Your Music Like a **Pro**

A step-by-step guide for independent and debuting artists — from the first song to a release the world can actually find. No label required.

MNMUSICPRODUCTIONS.COM

WELCOME

You don't need a label. You need a plan.

The tools to make and release world-class music are finally in your hands. What most artists are missing isn't talent — it's a clear, ordered process. This playbook is that process.

Across fifteen years producing globally — collaborating with Grammy Award-winning artists, major labels and publishers — I've seen the same thing happen again and again: talented artists stall out, not because the music wasn't good, but because they skipped a step, released into silence, or did everything in the wrong order.

So I broke the whole journey down into ten steps. Follow them in order and you'll go from a song on your laptop to a release that's protected, polished, discoverable, and building you a real audience.

Read it once start to finish, then keep it open as a checklist for every single release. Let's get to work.

How to use this guide: Don't try to master all ten steps at once. Take your next song and move it through them one at a time. Momentum beats perfection.

THE 10-STEP RELEASE ROADMAP

- 1 Start With the Song** — write something only you could write
- 2 Get the Production Right** — arrangement, recording, mix & master
- 3 Protect What You Create** — copyright, splits & publishing
- 4 Define Your Brand & Image** — who you are to your listener
- 5 Nail Your Cover Art** — the first thing anyone sees
- 6 Distribute Everywhere** — get on every platform, the right way
- 7 Pitch for Playlists** — earn placements that drive discovery
- 8 Build a Real Fanbase** — turn listeners into superfans
- 9 Market & Monetize** — grow reach and actually get paid
- 10 Land Sync Placements** — get your music into film, TV & ads

Make something worth releasing

01 Start With the Song

Production can elevate a song, but it can't save a weak one. Every great release starts with a story worth telling and a melody people can't shake.

- Write the lyric and melody so they stand on their own with just one instrument — if it moves you on an acoustic guitar or a piano, you have something.
- Lead with a hook and an idea that's specific to *you*. Specific is memorable; generic disappears.
- Demo fast and often. Capture the rough idea on your phone before you overthink it.
- Get honest feedback from people who aren't your friends or family.

TOOLS TO TRY

Hooktheory to learn the chords & melodies behind real hits · **Suno** or **Udio** to sketch a demo idea in minutes · **Splice** for royalty-free loops and sounds · **RhymeZone** for lyric writing.

FROM THE PROS

Michael Jackson reportedly wrote dozens of songs for every album and released only the best few; Prince left a vault of thousands of unreleased tracks. **The hits come from volume.**

02 Get the Production Right

This is where your sound competes with everything else on the playlist. Arrangement, recording, mixing and mastering are what make a song feel finished and radio-ready.

- Serve the song first. Every sound, layer and section should earn its place — if it doesn't add, cut it.
- Record the best performance you can; great production starts at the source, not the plugin.
- Mix for translation — check it on earbuds, phone speakers and in the car, not just your studio monitors.
- Master for the platforms so your track sits at a competitive loudness on streaming without losing punch.

TOOLS TO TRY

Logic Pro, **Ableton Live** or **FL Studio** to produce · **Melodyne** or **Auto-Tune** for vocal tuning · **iZotope Ozone**, **LANDR** or **eMastered** for mastering.

FROM THE PROS

Rick Rubin can't play an instrument or run a mixing desk — what he brings is taste. He strips songs down until only what matters is left. **Production is decisions, not gear.**

Protect it, then define who you are

03 Protect What You Create

The moment your music is worth something, you'll be glad you handled the boring-but-critical paperwork up front. Own your work and your rights.

- Agree on songwriting splits *in writing* with every collaborator before release — even with friends. This prevents the most common (and ugliest) disputes in music.
- Register your songs with a Performing Rights Organization (PRO) to collect performance royalties.
- Set up publishing administration so you collect the mechanical and global royalties most independent artists leave on the table.
- Keep clean files and metadata — correct names, splits and credits attached to every track.

TOOLS TO TRY

ASCAP or **BMI** to register as a PRO · **Songtrust** for worldwide publishing admin · **The MLC** to collect U.S. mechanicals · **Cosynd** for split sheets & copyright filings.

FROM THE PROS

The organ player on "A Whiter Shade of Pale" had to sue for a songwriting credit — and won, decades after the song came out. **Sort out your splits before you release, not in court.**

04 Define Your Brand & Image

Your brand is the promise your name makes before a note plays. It's not a logo — it's the consistent feeling, story and look that makes a stranger remember you.

- Get clear on your artist story: where you're from, what you stand for, why your music sounds the way it does.
- Define a visual world — colors, fonts, mood — and keep it consistent across every photo, cover and post.
- Lock your name everywhere: the same handle on every platform, a simple website, and a clean artist bio.
- Be a person, not a billboard. Fans connect with authenticity, not perfection.

TOOLS TO TRY

Canva for a consistent visual kit · **Midjourney** for mood & concept images · **Linktree** to centralize your links · **Squarespace** for a simple artist site.

FROM THE PROS

Daft Punk never showed their faces. Two robot helmets made them one of the most recognizable acts on earth — **a clear, consistent image is worth as much as the music.**

Look the part, then put it out

05 Nail Your Cover Art

Your cover is the single most-seen piece of your release — the thumbnail in every feed, playlist and search. It has to stop the scroll and look like it belongs next to the artists you admire.

- Design for the thumbnail first. If it doesn't read at the size of a postage stamp, it doesn't work.
- Match the art to the sound and your brand world — the cover should set the mood before the music does.
- Keep it clean and uncluttered; one strong idea beats five competing ones.
- Meet the technical specs: 3000×3000 px, square, RGB, no logos or URLs that violate platform rules.

TOOLS TO TRY

Canva or **Photoshop** to design · **Midjourney** or **DALL-E** for concepts · **Fiverr** or **99designs** to hire a cover designer.

FROM THE PROS

Pink Floyd's "The Dark Side of the Moon" has no band name and no title on the cover — just a prism. **One fearless idea became one of the most recognizable images in music.**

06 Distribute Everywhere

Distribution gets your music onto Spotify, Apple Music and every other platform. Doing it right — and early — unlocks the tools that actually drive a release.

- Choose a reputable distributor and deliver your track *at least 3–4 weeks before* release day.
- Submit early to claim your Spotify for Artists and Apple Music for Artists profiles — you'll need them for pitching.
- Get every detail right: correct metadata, spelling, features, and a release date you can build hype toward.
- Set up pre-saves so day-one streams and saves hit hard — early momentum tells the algorithm to keep pushing.

TOOLS TO TRY

DistroKid, **TuneCore**, **CD Baby** or **Amuse** to deliver to every store · then claim **Spotify for Artists** and **Apple Music for Artists**.

FROM THE PROS

Chance the Rapper never signed to a label. "Coloring Book" became the first streaming-only album to win a Grammy — **the right distribution and rollout did what a label used to.**

Get found, then build a following

07 Pitch for Playlists

Playlists are where new listeners discover you. Editorial, algorithmic and independent playlists each reward a different move — and you want all three.

- Pitch to Spotify's editors through Spotify for Artists the moment your track is delivered (before release day — this is the deadline most artists miss).
- Drive strong early saves and completion rates to trigger algorithmic playlists like Discover Weekly and Radio.
- Build genuine relationships with independent curators — a personal, well-targeted pitch beats a mass blast.
- Never pay for fake streams or bot playlists. It kills your algorithmic standing and can get you removed.

TOOLS TO TRY

Spotify for Artists for editorial pitches · **SubmitHub**, **Groover** or **Daily Playlists** to reach independent curators directly.

FROM THE PROS

Spotify's Discover Weekly turns listening data into discovery — within a couple of years of launch it had driven billions of streams, **much of it to artists with no radio and no label.**

08 Build a Real Fanbase

Streams are rented attention. Fans are yours. A thousand people who truly care about your music will sustain a career longer than a million passive listeners.

- Capture emails and phone numbers — the only audience no algorithm can take away from you.
- Show up consistently. Pick one or two platforms and post like a person, not a marketer.
- Turn listeners into insiders: behind-the-scenes, early access, the story behind the song.
- Reward your earliest fans — they become the ones who tell everyone else.

TOOLS TO TRY

Mailchimp or **ConvertKit** for email · **Laylo** or **Community** for SMS drops · **Discord** for a fan community · **Patreon** for paid memberships.

FROM THE PROS

Writer Kevin Kelly's "1,000 True Fans" essay argued you don't need millions of listeners — just a thousand people who'll buy whatever you make. **That's a career.**

Grow your reach and get paid

09 Market & Monetize

Marketing is just helping the right people find music they'll love. Monetization is making sure your art can fund the next release.

- Make short-form video your discovery engine — it's the cheapest reach in music right now.
- Build a simple content rhythm around each release: tease, release, then keep feeding it for weeks.
- Diversify income: streaming, merch, direct-to-fan support, sync, live shows and licensing.
- Track what works with your platform analytics and double down on it.

TOOLS TO TRY

CapCut to cut short-form video · **TikTok & Instagram Reels** for reach · **Meta Ads Manager** for targeted ads · **Bandcamp** and **Printful** for merch & direct sales.

FROM THE PROS

In 2020 a single TikTok of a man skateboarding to Fleetwood Mac's "Dreams" sent the 1977 song back onto the charts. **Short-form video is the most powerful discovery engine in music.**

10 Land Sync Placements

Sync — getting your music into film, TV, games and ads — can pay more than a million streams and put you in front of huge new audiences. Independent artists are perfectly positioned for it.

- Keep your masters and publishing clean and one-stop, so you can clear a placement quickly.
- Prepare instrumental and clean versions plus stems — supervisors need options, fast.
- Write to picture and emotion; sync loves songs that set a mood without fighting the dialogue.
- Build relationships with music supervisors and sync libraries, and tag your work with clean metadata.

TOOLS TO TRY

Songtradr, **Musiced**, **Artlist** or **Marmoset** to list your catalog · **DISCO** to deliver polished song packages to music supervisors.

FROM THE PROS

Moby licensed every track on his album "Play" to films, TV and ads. **The sync placements turned a record that first flopped into a multi-million seller.**

BEFORE YOU HIT RELEASE

Your release-day checklist

Run every single through this list. If you can tick all ten, you're not just dropping a song — you're launching it.

- | | |
|--|--|
| ☐ Song is finished and you'd be proud to hear it anywhere | ☐ Artist brand and visuals are consistent |
| ☐ Professionally mixed and mastered for streaming | ☐ Cover art reads at thumbnail size, 3000×3000 |
| ☐ Songwriting splits agreed in writing | ☐ Delivered to distributor 3–4 weeks early |
| ☐ Registered with your PRO + publishing admin set up | ☐ Pitched to editors + pre-saves live |
| | ☐ Content + fanbase plan ready for launch week |
| | ☐ Clean files prepped for future sync opportunities |

Ready to make the record?

This playbook is the map. If you want a partner for the journey — production, mixing, scoring, or 1-on-1 artist development tailored to where you are right now — that's exactly what I do.

Book a free call at mnmusicproductions.com · I'd love to hear what you're working on.