

Imagine you're at a busy metropolitan airport. The luggage carousel goes around, and people stop by, check the luggage tags, and pick up their belongings. As the day wanes, though, there are still lots of suitcases left on the conveyor belt with no luggage tags and no one to claim them. Now, what if I told you that those suitcases are all filled with cash – stacks of bills totaling millions of dollars – and some of it might be yours?

The same thing happens if a music service or web DJ opens your file or pops in your CD, and sees 'Track 1' and 'Artist Unknown.' You miss out on royalties. Many millions of dollars have been earmarked for "promo only," "self-released" and "artist unknown." This is part of an industry-wide problem created by a lack of standardized, quality metadata. But there's good news: you can help fix the problem, and by doing so, **get your share of that cash.**

### What is metadata?

Metadata is the identification tool in the digital distribution of music. It's what makes sure the information about a track pops up on your MP3 player, or on a webcaster's music player. It needs to include, at the very least, the artist or group name, copyright holder or label name, and track and album titles (there are dozens of optional things to include, but these are the basics). The marketing, categorization and revenue related to your music rely on proper metadata.

### How do I get the metadata in there?

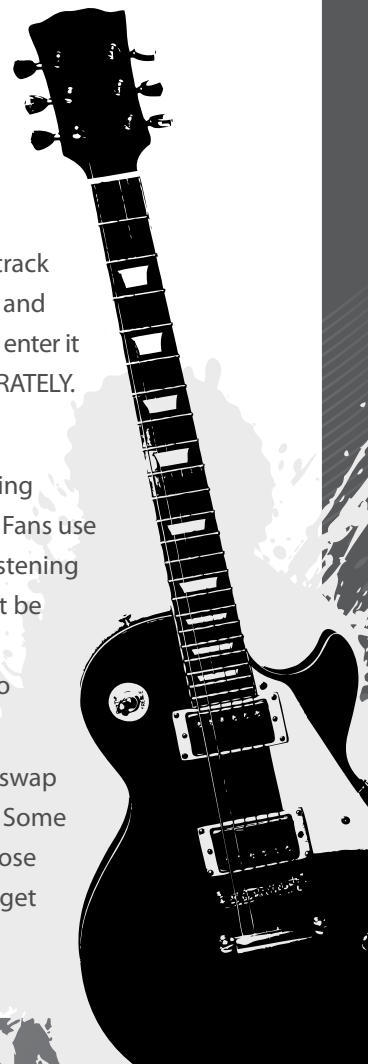
Many audio software tools allow you to create metadata digitally and store it as part of the sound file, and online services are available. Work with your studio engineer/producer to ensure that recording information is entered at that phase and is accurate.

Then, again at the pre-distribution phase, it is imperative to attach all remaining metadata to the audio track (e.g., final publishing and master rights ownership information, ISRC and UPC codes, artist name, track and album title, genre, track length, date of release, etc.). This can be done by most digital aggregators and distributors. Typically, the distributor may ask you to provide the information on a spreadsheet or ask you to enter it into their forms online. When entering the metadata, it is crucial that it is entered **CONSISTENTLY AND ACCURATELY.**

### That sounds like a lot of work: Is it worth it?

The more your tracks are distributed and consumed digitally in today's music industry landscape, assuring metadata is correct and consistent is crucial to properly marketing and getting paid for your recording. Fans use it to find you by genre on download sites (you don't want to be a death metal band listed in the Easy Listening section). Marketing dollars you've put behind your release can go to waste because excited fans will not be able to find your single or CD on their favorite download site. For streams, SoundExchange relies upon services' reports to divvy up royalties, so if your record is listed as "Track 1," by "Various Artists" on "Promo Only," SoundExchange may not know where to send the royalties.

Once incorrect information is out there, it's very difficult to correct it or add it on. What's more, services swap tracks and pass files around, so one track without good metadata can multiply into a very big problem. Some of the largest retailers use only one or two services for all the data behind their music. If even one of those services has wrong information, you may see your data wrong practically everywhere. It's important to get the metadata right in every file from the beginning – before you send it out, even as a demo.



### **Doesn't (my engineer, my distributor, my producer, iTunes, TureCore, CDBaby) do this for me?**

No one cares about your work (or your money) as much as you do. That makes you the best, and sometimes the only, person with the incentive to get the data right. Do it yourself, or follow up with those who say they'll handle it, and make sure they have. Ask digital distributors to send you sample tracks, so you can check the information. Send the files to a few friends, and have them each play the track on a different MP3 player or media application. Make sure the metadata shows up every time, and that it's correct and consistent. No one will do it for you.

### **I always spell my name the same way. So what do you mean "be consistent?"**

Computers aren't as smart as people – they don't really read, they recognize characters. So a computer reading your metadata will think that Hall & Oates, Hall and Oates, Hall/Oates, D. Hall & J. Oates are each different bands, and it's much more difficult to ensure that every royalty will make it back to the real band. So once you've decided how to write out your band or label name, stick with writing it just that one way. The same goes for labels. If the label name is "XYZ Records" DO NOT just list it as "XYZ" nor list it as "XYZ Productions" or "XYZ Music." Choose how it will be listed and remain consistent in all listings.

### **What is an ISRC? Do I need one?**

The International Standard Recording Code (ISRC) is the international identification system for sound recordings and music videos. And no, you don't need one for your track to have complete metadata, and having one does not mean that you don't have to include all the other information. Each ISRC is a unique and permanent identifier for a specific recording which can be permanently encoded into a product as its digital fingerprint. An ISRC can be obtained by contacting the Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA) or through your digital aggregator or distributor. But remember, each country has their own "standard," so don't count on the ISRC to provide all the data you need.

### **Conclusion**

Revenue generated in the new digital music economy consists of pennies and fractions of pennies, multiplied by billions of transactions, for many different kinds of uses of music. The only way the digital music model is going to work is if every penny, every little packet of cash, is labeled well enough to get back to the person who earned it. So before those suitcases full of unclaimed money go around the carousel another time, make sure you slap a luggage tag on what's yours.

Register at [www.soundexchange.com](http://www.soundexchange.com) today!

\*All statistics and content valid as of 12/15/11