

# The Music Managers Forum

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How to.....

Make the Most of  
Streaming



In short, there are various factors that can have an effect on your bottom line and it's important to understand them before chastising streaming as a format.

Of course, the reason why your streaming royalty cheque feels a little light from month to month may simply be because you aren't making the most of your streaming presence. As with sending your album to record shops or download stores, it's no good simply distributing your music and hoping people will stumble across it – you have to work hard to stand out in an increasingly competitive market.

And no two retail spaces can be approached in the same way. To find success on a streaming platform, you need a strategy that takes into consideration its mechanisms, quirks, audiences and opportunities.

We've asked a number of streaming experts from across the industry – as well as some of the platforms themselves – for their top tips on how to properly utilise this increasingly important route to market.

### **Treat your artist page like a shop window**

It's not unusual to spend hours making sure your Facebook page looks the part (read our Facebook marketing guide to find out exactly how to do that effectively) and if you want fans to spend more time exploring your work on streaming services, you should put just as much effort into your artist pages across all platforms.

"It's about making your page as sticky as possible for the user," says Spotify's Director of Artist Services Bryan Johnson. "This can be done through simple things like making sure you've got a header and profile image, making sure your bio is up to date and utilising our merchandise section and integration with Songkick, which pulls in the nearest show to the user by geo-location. What we're trying to do with the artist page is give a more complete picture of an artists' career – live and merchandise offerings as well as releases."

A key part of optimising your artist page on Spotify is verification. Just as with Twitter or Facebook, the blue tick tells fans that they're in the right place when looking for your music but, with Spotify, verification offers more than just a feel of authenticity. Perhaps most important is the ability share your listening habits with fans along with fully branded playlists.

Google Play Music offers a download store alongside its streaming service, but the advice from the platform's Music Partner Manager, Artist Relations, Lizzie Dickson is the same. "Where possible, take control of your presence," she says. "We always advise claiming your artist page on Google Play Music. This will be your home for all of your music on our service. You can upload and change your custom artist photo and bio whenever you like, and add website and social media links.

"Independent artists who don't work with a distributor can also choose where their music is available, and suggest retail prices. We have just rolled out integration with Band Page to pull in artist profile pictures too so you can control that element directly through your Band Page account."

Digital Director at Absolute Label Services, Adam Cardew, emphasises the importance of first impressions when it comes your artist's profile on any streaming platform. "The aim for us is to use streaming as an entry point to get new fans on board," he explains. "In an industry where it's increasingly difficult to get people to buy your music without listening to it and falling in love with it first, it's important to see streaming as the first interaction you'll have with that potential fan. That means you need to really think about how your profile comes across – is it indicative of you as an artist?"

### **Create playlists**

Playlists have become something of a hot topic for major and indie artists alike in recent months with many streaming services actively encouraging acts to create their own as a way of sharing their influences and listening habits.

"We are investing heavily in playlists on the platform," says Google Play's Dickson. "We have a global in-house editorial team who update numerous playlists all the time to bring our users the best mix of new and classic music."

More than just a nice activity, regularly updating and sharing playlists is a good way of connecting with fans and bringing them back into your streaming world.

"A good example of that is George Ezra, who has a playlist called the Sunday Service," says Spotify's Johnson. "His fans know that he's going to add a couple of tracks to it each week and then tell people about it on his socials,

linking to the bands he's added. What he's doing is creating traction on Spotify and other networks and driving people back to his playlist. Ultimately you want people to be listening to your own music, but it's important to have different hooks to bring people in."

### **Get your songs onto other people's playlists**

When you're not making playlists yourself, you should be spending time getting your music on to other people's playlists. The promotional power of some of the most subscribed to lists across platforms – especially when they're combined – results in undeniable clout when it comes to being discovered by potential fans.

"Playlists sit somewhere in between a specialist radio station and a compilation album. They evolve as a radio station does but are longer than a typical radio playlist," says Justin Barker, founder of Slice Music, a digital marketing company specialising in streaming services. "They're going to be the main driver of people discovering you and you want to be in as many of those as you can because there are very few that are big enough to mean mass discovery in isolation."

When it comes to getting your music on streaming playlists, it's all about being in the right places in order to catch the attention of tastemakers at the various platforms.

"If you're the sort of artist that is getting traction on blogs, Hype Machine and those kind of metrics, then I think you're more likely to be in front of the right people putting these playlists together," says Barker.

And that's a key point to remember. While some streaming playlists are put together by algorithms, there are many that have real people behind them.

It's similar at Spotify: "We have a team of editors globally who curate them," says Johnson. "They're sifting through blogs, magazines and websites trying to source the best new music. We also have a back end system that throws up new tracks to us, so we're alerted to what's trending online."

"The New Music Friday playlists are built by real humans with real ears, and we've got a couple of other playlists that are really starting to benefit new artists. There's one called Fresh Finds, which is algorithmic and scans for tracks online that are trending by breaking artists. UK

Spotlight artist Max Pope was brought to our attention through that playlist."

"There are the Viral Charts as well," adds Spotify's Director of Publisher and Songwriter Relations Jules Parker, "which are built just through sharing on the service – the charts are based on users sharing tracks with others. If you're encouraging usage and sharing, then often that will just build into the Viral Chart. And it's worth remembering that radio stations are taking notice of the Viral Chart now to find out what new music is out there."

### **Make use of analytics**

Analytics are playing an increasingly important role in every aspect of the music industry and streaming is no different, with most platforms giving artists and managers some key insights into their performance on the service. On Spotify, for example, as well as basic play counts, you're able to see cities where you're most popular and how users discovered your music. Spotify will be offering more stats in the coming months with its new Fan Insights service, which is currently in beta.

"It's going to give you so much more," says Parker, "Top 50 cities, top tracks, it'll put your listeners into groups such as 'super fans' and really give more analysis into how you're performing and who your fans are. It has a very practical use because you can plan a tour off the back of knowing which cities are listening to your music most."

"We're encouraging people to log in daily and look at their stats in real time," adds Johnson. "Analytics tools are great but getting people to use them regularly and actively use the data to impact on their career can be the toughest part."

### **Remember the stream is just the start**

An artist's output doesn't stop with individual tracks. Streaming services can act as a great portal allowing fans to buy into their favourite acts in a number of ways. It's therefore important that you don't see the success of a streaming presence simply as the figure on the end of your royalty statement.

"You need think of the long game," says Absolute's Cardew. "Someone who finds you on streaming platform may then go on to buy a gig ticket or a merch item. So it's

about using your streaming presence to link to other things like your website or upcoming tours.

“On Apple Music, for instance, you can use Connect – which speaks to people who have streamed your music, followed you or bought a download – to direct listeners to a tour ticket outside of the platform. You can use annotations on YouTube videos to do similar things as well. It’s about having a long term aim and configuring a streaming profile to get there.”

And, while streaming can provide the catalyst for growth right across an artist’s career, it’s best used as part of a diverse strategy, as Universal Music UK’s Head of Streaming Matt Allard explains: “As with anything to do with streaming, it’s about the sum of a lot of parts, it’s never about just one part. You have to be creative and find as many ways as possible to engage the audience and encourage the cross-pollination and virality you need to have a hit. That means off-platform marketing as a co-ordinated approach, alongside everything you can do on the platforms themselves.”

### **Make your songs available**

There’s still plenty of debate about the best approach when it comes to timing the release of songs to streaming platforms alongside radio and retail. An act may withhold from streaming, organise a windowed release or go day and date with radio.

“There’s a huge correlation between streaming and radio and other mediums,” says Spotify’s Johnson. “If a track is playing on radio, there’s going to be a positive knock on effect into its performance on Spotify. We want to ensure that artists benefit from this by having their music available on Spotify as soon as it’s serviced to radio.”

MMF has previously campaigned for ‘on air, on sale’ and we feel just as strongly about ‘on air, on stream’. It’s 2016 and the web allows fans the world over to consume music however they want, wherever they want, whenever they want. Denying consumers that freedom often leads to them either choosing another artist or heading for pirate sites. We consider windowing a short term strategy which will damage confidence in streaming – a platform that is finally returning value to the music industry. It’s our belief that there are better ways to add value for fans. At the end of the day, however, it’s an artist’s (and manager’s) right to choose.

**Stephen Taverner, East City Management**

## From the Managers: Streaming Success Stories

It's all very well talking about theoretical streaming strategies, but how do things transpire in the real world? We sat down with a handful of artist managers who have seen success with the format to find out how they've approached it and the impact it's had for some of their acts' careers.

**Conrad Murray, SJM**

"Spotify have been a great part of building Blossoms' story and helping get them to the masses. We asked them if there were any playlists that the band could get on and they pushed them as much as they could. Eventually, with later tracks, they pushed them for New Music Friday in the US and the UK, which introduced them to a massive amount of people. That was huge for us and you could see the kind of impact it was having at gigs.

"We started doing our own playlists as well. If the band were playing Liverpool, for example, they'd do a playlist of their favourite songs from bands from Liverpool. Those bands would retweet it and that'd help with other areas of social media. We'd make a point of doing playlists for each city and then send them out to online music sites, which would get the band extra press.

"We also get access to statistics about who's listened to what and where, and how many times people have listened to tracks in a day. We've sent those figures to international departments at labels and said, 'Look, this is exactly where people are listening'. We can send it to our agent as well, who in turn sends it to promoters. That helps us plot tours around Europe.

"Getting on to certain playlists can provide the same thrill of getting on a radio playlist. One track in particular, called Stormy, was the fourth track on an EP but was picked up by a Spanish coffee bar acoustic playlist and has had over a million plays now as a result. It's got traction around the world and I can't think how else that would have happened, because radio wasn't going to pick it up.

"And I think we're getting more revenue from Spotify than we would be if we were still just releasing stuff on CD. For tracks like Stormy, which has had a million plays, that revenue wouldn't come from anywhere else."

"I have always liked to use social media as a promotional tool to get things started. It stems from my time at Rough Trade in the 80's. We would struggle to get some of our releases played on radio, so we turned to the guy behind the counter at indie record shops up and down the country. He was the guy that would start the word of mouth in each town. He was a legend, a trusted source for the local music heads and they would buy everything he tipped as being good. Music fans would then go off and try to outdo each other down the pub or in the school playground about how much better this obscure artist was compared to that obscure artist. Everyone felt like they were in an exclusive club, a club that I was also a proud member of.

"For me, there is only one rule: the better the song, the further it will travel online. I remember arguing with an artist a few years ago about putting their single up on their Myspace page. They were worried that we would be blowing, what they thought, was their biggest song too early. I managed to convince them and within days I was getting phone calls from iTunes in California, radio stations in Australia etc. No label, no PR, just a couple of amazing songs on their Myspace page.

"With alt-J, while the band were still at uni, we recorded four of what became their biggest hits on the debut album and stuck them up on SoundCloud as free downloads for a year. Again, no PR, label etc. By the time the band did eventually sign a record deal, those tracks had had over 100,000 downloads and the band had the beginnings of a healthy live following.

"Now, it's Spotify. With Will Joseph Cook we'd had almost 5 million global streams before we'd had any traditional media coverage. Obviously, because it's global, your ticket sales will take a while to catch-up with your streams, but we have found that there is definitely an awareness that can be built upon at a venue level.

"The sharing facility is incredibly useful to us. We try to get on to as many playlists as possible, both Spotify's own and user generated. We spend a lot of time talking to people. Even if they've only got 2,000 followers, we make sure they're aware of what we're doing and what releases we've got coming up. With the user generated playlists, combined, you've got millions of potential streams. Spotify are not allowed to give out user generated playlist contact info, so we have had to do a fair amount of detective work to find the good ones."

## Lyndon Stephens, CS Music Management

"Over the last year and a half we've had 30 million plays across Ciaran Lavery's catalogue – an EP and an album, self-released. There wasn't a big budget for promotion.

"One of the tracks, Left For America, had a couple of million plays on Spotify, which introduced us to UK radio. We managed to use the Spotify figures as leverage and it became Zane Lowe's last Next Hype on Radio 1.

"Then we toured the UK and, looking at the Spotify data that we had, we saw that Germany was the third biggest territory in terms of where we were getting streams from. So we organised a German tour and used data on the back end of Spotify to determine what cities we were going to go to.

"We also got help from the BPI and UKTI Music Export Growth Scheme to help take Ciaran into Europe. In the past, that scheme had always been decided on how much physical product an artist had sold, but they took into account the high streaming numbers.

"He's signed a three album deal with Believe, which the streaming numbers played a role in, again.

"At present, we've got about 36 million plays, about 1.2 million a month. Our strategy is, instead of having a big build up, we release the music and then spend a year trying to promote it afterwards. It's about trying to generate an audience around those tracks and then keeping that audience.

"He's going to play Spotify House at SXSW in March and he's been asked to play at Willie Nelson's house with the album coming out in May. It'll be his second album and hopefully the one that breaks him. This is the first one that will have some serious marketing muscle and distribution behind it worldwide.

"He was helped greatly by being put on Spotify's own playlists but that also meant that people put him on their own smaller playlists as well. It means a track effectively goes viral and you can end up with thousands of shares. If I go into the back end of Spotify, it tells me he's on 84,000 playlists. They're not all big Spotify playlists but, even if they've only got 10 or 50 friends, it adds up."

## Eric Harle, D.E.F Artist Management

"I've always had a very international focus during my 25 years as a manager. Although, we are based in the UK, the majority of artists we work with come from other countries so we have natural connections with a lot of different territories. When I look at the likes of Sweden or Norway and the way Spotify has developed there, streaming isn't the future – it's the reality. There's hardly any physical business or downloads left anymore in those markets. The culture of how people listen to music has changed there and you can see the opportunities it has created.

"Spotify is fairly open to the artists and their managers, they are willing to collaborate directly to understand and better reach the artist's fanbase. This seems to be leading a shift in focus towards direct artist access and collaboration across the board, which is encouraging for us.

"The introduction of Fan Insights has been a huge boost for our understanding of how people interact with our artists' music around the world. We are already using it to inform our international strategy and focus.

"On streaming platforms in general, but particularly Spotify, music that would not have necessarily found a natural home in mainstream media seems to have another life. It's interesting to see the way certain tracks develop over time, and in different territories, completely outside of the usual 'single release' timeline and system. The playlist systems seem to really help here, coming from different territories – the opportunities there excite me."