

 **DISC MAKERS® PRESENTS:**

10 LICENSING TIPS

Getting Your Music Ready for Film and TV

by Michael Gallant



If you're like many independent artists trying to get your music heard far and wide, you might dream of having your music licensed for use in movies and TV shows. Music placement can indeed be a potent career booster — when it comes to visibility, credibility, and getting paid — but it's a tough world to break into, and many talented artists don't know where to start. To that end, here are some tips to help you get your house in order before you ever talk to a music supervisor on the phone — so when that precious licensing opportunity comes, you'll be ready.

1 Get the levels and format right.

"It's very important to get your tracks mastered," says Lindsay Fellows, music supervisor for movies like *The Avengers*, *Bridge to Terabithia*, and *Journey to the Center of the Earth*. "It's a good spend. You end up with a volume level that is going to be competitive with major label commercial releases. A lot of indie stuff I get is 30 decibels lower than major releases. It's flat and it doesn't pop, which isn't good. And these days, mastering, even with top engineers, isn't all that expensive."

When it comes to file format, diversity is key. "MP3s are usually fine to start off with," says music supervisor Gary Calamar, who has worked on shows like *Weeds*, *True Blood*, and *Men of a Certain Age*. "If we end up using the song in production, I will need a higher quality WAV or AIFF." Make sure that you have both the low-rez MP3 and higher-rez WAV or AIFF files ready to go.

Emailing MP3 files as attachments is often quite simple, but when it comes to larger WAV and AIFF files, look into free or inexpensive FTP services — [YouSendIt](#), [SendSpace](#), [MediaFire](#), and [DropBox](#) are a few worth checking out. Choose one and learn how to use it, so you can quickly and easily get music supervisors the big files they need.

2 Choose your very best music.

"Focus on your strongest material," says Fellows. "Either tag your physical CD with standout tracks or, if you're sending MP3s, send your three best songs."

But how do you know which tunes are your most powerful? "Choose the ones that work best live, the ones that your friends say are great," advises Fellows.

"Music supervisors look for a mood," adds Cheryl B. Engelhardt, an indie singer and songwriter who has had music placed in shows like *The Real World* and *All My Children*. "If a song doesn't evoke a lot of emotion, it won't do anything on screen. When I was choosing which songs to push for placement, I asked a lot of people. And even though I took everyone's advice with a grain of salt, it turned out that my favorite songs to play live are also the most licensable. It just kind of works that way."

Choosing your best songs also means choosing your best recordings — and the vast majority of the time, that means nothing that isn't the finished, polished master track. "I do want the final version of the song," said Calamar. "Sending me an unfinished demo to check out is generally a waste of my time."

3 Include everything music supervisors need to know.

"Whether you're sending a hard CD or digital files, make sure all of the info is there," says Fellows. "Publishers, writers, track names, contact info, label — everything should be there, easily accessible." If you're sending a physical CD, that could mean a sticker or insert in the album casing, or text printed directly on the CD — just make sure it's readable, easy to find, and hard to misplace. If you're submitting digital files, make sure that your metadata and ID3 tags (a.k.a. the identifying digital information that comes attached to music files) contain all the above-mentioned info that music supervisors may need. And regardless of whether you're going physical or virtual with your song submissions, make sure that your album is entered into the Gracenote database. "You wouldn't believe how many songs I get that come up listed as 'unknown' or 'Track 1' when I load them into iTunes," continues Fellows. "I delete them immediately. I just don't have time."



Free Mastering Review

A **FREE** audio mastering review by the SoundLAB at Disc Makers gives you the opportunity to have your master previewed by one of our mastering experts before your CD goes to press. [Learn more](#) at the SoundLAB website.

Quick hint: An easy way to edit the metadata attached to a song file is to put the track on an iTunes playlist, select the song, choose “Get Info” from the “File” pull-down menu, and enter the correct data in the fields provided. Entering your album into the Gracenote database is just as easy — import the songs from your album into iTunes; make sure that the track, artist, and album information is accurate; go to the “Advanced” pull-down menu; and select “Submit CD Track Names.” That’s it! For more information, you can visit gracenote.com/about/faqs.

Ed note: Disc Makers’ [Mega Distribution Bundle](#) includes Gracenote submission as well as digital distribution to iTunes and more.

4 Have non-vocal versions of your songs ready.

It’s always good to have instrumental versions of your tracks available, especially when you’re getting started as an artist, says Fellows. “After you do the mix, just have your engineer do a pass while taking the vocals out. You don’t have to press CDs of those, but you should at least have them in your library.” That way, he continued, if there’s a scene where the vibe is right but the music supervisor doesn’t want vocals, he or she can still use your tune.

Engelhardt goes a step farther, making sure that her instrument-only tracks are the exact same length as the vocal versions of her songs, and that their time-codes sync up exactly. “If music supervisors are trying to get an exact moment in a song, you don’t want to make them have to search for it,” she says. “You’re trying to make their job as easy as possible.”

5 Copyright your work.

Registering your songs with the U.S. Copyright office may be a little costly, but it’s strong protection of your intellectual property, and well worth the expense, says Engelhardt. “If you find yourself in any sort of legal battle, it’s great to have.”

Ed note: For more on copyrighting your work, read “[Copyright Basics: Exclusive rights, licensing lingo, and more](#)” on Echoes (Disc Makers’ indie-music blog).

Quick hint: Copyrighting songs online is now a relatively simple process — just visit www.copyright.gov to learn more, create a profile, and get your work rightfully protected under U.S. law.

6 Register with a performing rights organization.

One of the best ways to get paid for having your work used on screen is through performance royalties. The three big performing rights organizations (PROs) in the United States are [ASCAP](#), [BMI](#), and [SESAC](#). Once you sign up to be a member of one, register your original works with them. They monitor public performances of your music on your behalf, collect royalties, and send you payments based on where, how, and how often your music gets used.

Ask three successful songwriters and you’ll likely get three different answers as to which PRO is the best — so check out their respective webpages, get the opinions of music folks you respect, and choose whichever feels like the best fit.

Another resource to register with is [SoundExchange](#), a non-profit organization that tracks and collects royalties on your behalf from satellite radio, internet radio, and other new media outlets.

Like copyrighting, registering with a PRO is something to do as soon as the music is completed, and before any licensing opportunities might arise. In fact, Engelhardt recommends that you do your copyright and PRO registrations in the same sitting.

7 Work out ownership, permissions, and publishing ahead of time.

It’s vital to make sure that everyone who can legally claim a piece of your material be in the loop and agree upon who owns how much of what — before any phone call from a music supervisor comes.

“Make sure that you know all the parties involved, and that everybody is on board with it being licensed for a film or TV show,” advises Calamar. No doubt, a great way to sabotage a potential licensing deal is to say, “Um, sounds good to me, but I need to check with the drummer, cuz he wrote the lyrics. Can I get back to you in a week?” Get the explicit, written approval of any bandmates, writing partners, producers, or other potential shareholders ahead of time, so you can respond quickly and decisively when someone wants to license your tunes.

Ed note: For more advice on splitting song credits, read “[How bands and co-writers divide percentage shares in a song](#)” on Echoes.

8 Research music supervisors, TV shows, and movies.

“Do your homework,” asserts Fellows. “If you’re sending stuff out to music supervisors, know what shows they’re working on. IMDB is a great online resource. You start to see a pattern in terms of what types of music various supervisors are looking for.”

Calamar agrees: “Find out which shows I’m working on, watch the shows, and send appropriate music. Just because a song has the word ‘blood’ in the lyrics doesn’t make it right for *True Blood*.”

9 Choose the best packaging for your music.

If you're sending a physical CD, Fellows advises, make sure it's a regular jewel case and not a slimline. "People like stacking CDs as they listen, and they want spine labels. When they get a slimline, it doesn't fit in there, and nobody pays attention to discs in paper sleeves."

When Engelhardt visits film festivals and industry events with her music in hand, she comes prepared with a specially-printed run of discs. "I have my name and the words 'Ready For Placement' right there on the CD," she says. "Here's the name of the song's co-owner, the percentages of who owns what, and so on, all printed on the disc, so supervisors don't have to go looking anywhere else for information. I also make sure to have the vocal version of a song followed immediately by the instrumental version of it, again, so it's all right there."

10 Educate yourself about the business and legal ends of licensing.

There's a tremendous amount to learn about licensing your music, and the more you know, the better equipped you'll be to deal with any licensing opportunities that come your way. If you have access to folks who have had success on any side of the licensing game, see if you can take them out for lunch and respectfully grill them on their experiences. You'd be surprised how much you can learn just from friendly conversations.

Fellows also recommends getting familiar with standard music licensing agreements, which are the official documents that you may need to fill out in order to give a TV show or movie permission to use your music; when it comes time to fill one out yourself, he says, it's best if you're not seeing things for the first time. Just do an internet search on some variation of the phrase "music licensing agreement" to find samples far and wide.

And finally, in the unlikely and unfortunate event that any sort of legal situation involving your music starts to go south, don't be afraid to seek the help of an experienced music lawyer. Ask around amongst your music-minded peers for recommendations, or contact organizations like your local NARAS chapter to see if they can refer you. Lawyers can be very expensive, so also keep non-profit organizations like [California Lawyers for the Arts](#) and New York-based [Volunteer Lawyers for the Arts](#) in mind, as they can often help you get access and advice without bleeding your checking account.

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