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Releasing and Promoting Your Music

Recording a song and releasing a song are two different crafts. The first craft ends with a finished recording you are proud of. The second begins there — and it is a long, practical path: final files and credits, artwork, choosing a distributor, building a timeline, pitching playlists and press honestly, making social content that serves the music, tying the release to live performance, reading the results without fooling yourself, and knowing what to do in the weeks after release day when the excitement fades and the real work of a song's life begins. Most independent music does not fail at the recording stage. It fails in the unglamorous middle: files uploaded in the wrong format, credits misspelled, a release date chosen before anything was ready, promotion that started the morning the song came out.

This lesson set teaches the full path, in order, the way working independent artists and small labels actually walk it. It assumes you may be doing every job yourself — artist, label, publicist, and road crew in one person — and it is built for that reality: checklists instead of departments, timelines instead of panic, and honest promotion instead of purchased hype. Nothing here promises earnings, streams, playlist placements, or fame. Anyone who promises you those is selling something. What a good release process does promise is this: your music arrives complete, correct, and on time; the people most likely to care hear about it more than once; and every release teaches you something the next release uses.

Who does this help? It helps a first-time artist preparing a debut single, a band moving from live-only to recorded music, a songwriter releasing an EP made at home, and an experienced artist whose past releases felt chaotic and underheard. If you have ever said "the song is out — now what?" on release morning, this set exists so that question is answered weeks before release day, on paper.

By the end you will hold a complete release system: a finish checklist, a metadata habit, a distributor decision you understand, a week-by-week timeline, a pitching method that respects editors and journalists, a content plan that does not consume your life, and a calm way to read results and plan the next step. The music stays yours. The system just makes sure the world gets a fair chance to find it.

What You Will Learn

- How to truly finish a recording: final mixes, masters, versions, and file standards for release
- How to prepare credits, lyrics, and metadata correctly — and why errors here cost money and listeners
- How artwork works for a release: requirements, readability at small sizes, and honest presentation
- How to choose a distributor by comparing what they actually do, charge, and pay
- How to build a release timeline working backward from release day, with realistic lead times

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- How to pitch playlists, radio, and press honestly and professionally, without buying fake engagement
- How to plan social content around a release in batches, and tie the release to live performance
- How to read release results — streams, saves, listeners, sales — and decide the next step after release day

Lesson 1 — Finishing the Recording: Masters, Mixes, Credits, and Files

A release can only be as strong as the files it is built from, and "finished" is a technical word, not a feeling. Artists lose weeks and miss release dates because the song they thought was done exists as three confusing versions, a mix nobody approved, and a master that lives on one person's laptop. Finishing properly means: one approved final mix, one final master made from it, clean backup copies, a set of useful versions, and a credits list that is complete and correctly spelled. Do this lesson before you pick a release date. Dates chosen before finishing are wishes.

Understand the chain in plain terms. The **mix** is the balanced version of the recording: every instrument and voice at its level, with its effects, as the artist approved it. The **master** is the finished, polished version of that mix, prepared for listening everywhere — the file that actually gets released. Mastering adjusts overall tone, loudness, and consistency so the song holds up on phones, cars, earbuds, and big speakers, and so songs on an EP or album sit together as one body of work. Whether you hire a mastering engineer or use a careful automated service, the rule is the same: the master is made from the final mix, and once mastering is done, the mix does not change. If the mix changes, the master must be remade. Bands break this rule constantly — "just one tiny vocal tweak after mastering" — and end up with mismatched files and wrong versions live.

Approve like a professional. Listen to the final mix and master on several systems: decent headphones, cheap earbuds, a car, a phone speaker. Listen for problems, not pleasure: words you cannot understand, harsh peaks that hurt, a chorus that feels smaller than the verse, endings cut off, beginnings with long silence. Check the start and end carefully — releases need clean starts and natural tails, not clipped fades. Then stop. Endless revision is also a failure mode: set an approval listen, note real problems only, fix those once, and approve. A song released very good and on time beats a song perfected forever in a folder.

Prepare the **versions** a release career needs. Alongside the main master, keep: an instrumental version (for licensing, content, and live backing use), a clean or edited version if the lyrics require one for radio or family audiences, and — for singles — sometimes a short edit. Create these at finishing time, from the same mix session, not months later when files are lost and settings forgotten. Name every file with one pattern: Artist — Title — Version — Format. Keep the release folder sacred: final masters in one place, backed up in a second place, with nothing named "final" that is not.

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Write the **credits** while memories are fresh: songwriters with legal names and splits (your song log, if you keep one, is the source), performers, producer, engineers, studio, featured artists exactly as they wish to be credited. Credits are not decoration. They drive payments, they appear on platforms, and errors — a misspelled songwriter, a missing featured artist — are painful or impossible to fix after release. Read every name aloud to the person it belongs to before you submit anything.

The Steps

1. Freeze the arrangement and recording: no new parts after the finishing date you set.
2. Approve one final mix, listening on headphones, earbuds, car, and phone speaker, noting real problems only.
3. Master from that final mix only; if the mix changes afterward, remaster — no exceptions.
4. Check starts, ends, fades, and gaps between tracks on an EP or album, in order, in one sitting.
5. Export the needed versions now: main, instrumental, clean edit if needed, from the same session.
6. Name all files with one pattern and place final masters in one release folder, backed up in a second location.
7. Write the complete credits list — writers, splits, performers, producer, engineers, featured artists — and verify every spelling with its owner.

A Worked Example

Singer-songwriter Ana Ruiz finishes her single "Paper Moon." Her finishing week looks boring, which is the point. Monday: final mix approved after listens in her car and on her phone, with one noted fix — the last word of the bridge was buried, raised once, re-approved. Tuesday: the master returns from her engineer; she checks the start (clean, no click), the end (the reverb tail completes, not clipped), and loudness against two reference songs she admires. Wednesday: versions exported — main master, instrumental, and a clean edit her local radio contact requested. Files named "Ana Ruiz — Paper Moon — Main Master.wav" and stored in the release folder, backed up to cloud storage the same day. Thursday: credits sheet completed with her co-writer, whose legal name and 30 percent split come straight from their song log, plus producer and engineer credits read back to each person by message. When Ana opens her distributor account the next week, every question it asks — file, title, writers, credits — is answered from finished materials in minutes. Her previous release, by contrast, had missed its date because the "final" master turned out to be an unmastered mix on a bandmate's drive. The difference was not talent or budget. It was finishing as a discipline, done before the date was chosen.

Common Mistakes

- **Choosing a release date before the master exists.** Every later step — artwork, pitching, content — needs lead time counted from finished files, not hopes.

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- **Tweaking the mix after mastering.** The master belongs to the mix it was made from. Change one, remake the other, or release a mismatch.
- **Keeping finals in scattered places with playful names.** "Song_final_FINAL_use this one2.wav" on one laptop is how wrong versions get released and right versions get lost.
- **Skipping instrumental and clean versions.** They are cheap at finishing time and expensive or impossible later — and licensing and radio ask for them without warning.
- **Writing credits from memory at upload time.** Misspelled writers and wrong splits at the distributor become wrong payments for years. Verify names with their owners first.

Lesson 2 — Artwork, Metadata, and Choosing a Distributor

Independent artists no longer press records and beg shops for shelf space. They upload files to a **distributor** — a service that delivers your music to streaming platforms and stores, collects the money those platforms pay, and passes your share to you. Choosing and using a distributor well is a core release skill, and it begins before upload day, with two assets the distributor will ask for: artwork and metadata.

Artwork is the release's face. Platforms require a square image meeting their technical rules — size, resolution, and file type — which your distributor will state; follow them exactly, because non-compliant artwork is a top cause of delayed releases. Beyond compliance, design for the size listeners actually see: a small square on a phone. Artwork that works is readable and recognizable at thumbnail size — the artist name and title, if used at all, in type that survives shrinking; one strong image rather than a crowded collage; honest presentation that does not imitate another artist's branding or use images you have no right to use. You need the rights to your artwork just as others hold rights in music: use your own photos and designs, licensed stock, or a designer who confirms in writing what you may use and where. Keep the source files. The artwork you make for this single will be wanted again — for posters, social posts, and the next release's consistency.

Metadata is the information about the music: artist name exactly as it should appear everywhere, release title, track titles, featured artists, genre, language, explicit or clean marking, release date, songwriter names, and codes the distributor assigns or accepts. Metadata sounds clerical. It is actually financial plumbing. A featuring credit entered in the title on one release and as a featured artist on another can split your catalog across two artist pages. A songwriter name spelled two ways creates two payment identities. An explicit song marked clean — or the reverse — creates platform problems and listener complaints. The habit that protects you: one artist-name spelling, everywhere, forever; a metadata sheet for each release filled in from your credits sheet, checked by a second pair of eyes; and patience at upload — metadata entered in a midnight rush is metadata you will be correcting, where correction is even possible, for months.

Choosing a distributor is a comparison, not a popularity contest. Compare on facts: What does it cost — per release, per year, or a percentage of earnings — and what happens to your music if you stop paying? How and when does it pay you, and is there a minimum payout

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threshold? Which platforms does it deliver to, and how fast? Does it offer pre-saves, release pitching tools, split payments to collaborators, and content identification for your recordings on video platforms? How good is its support when something goes wrong — because the true test of a distributor is the day a release lands on the wrong artist page. Read the terms for what you grant: distributors need delivery rights, but understand the term, territory, and any extras bundled into the agreement. There is no single best distributor for everyone. There is a best fit for your budget, catalog size, and how much help you want — chosen by comparison, written down, and reviewed yearly as your catalog grows.

Upload early. Distributors and platforms need processing time, and pitching opportunities (Lesson 4) require the release to be delivered weeks before release day. Build upload day into your timeline with buffer: if the distributor flags your artwork or a title, you want days to fix it, not hours.

The Steps

1. Make artwork to the distributor's exact technical rules, designed to read clearly at phone-thumbnail size.
2. Confirm in writing that you hold the rights to every image, photo, font use, and design element in the artwork.
3. Build a metadata sheet from your credits sheet: exact artist name, titles, featured artists, writers, genre, language, explicit marking.
4. Compare at least three distributors on cost model, what happens if you stop paying, payout timing and thresholds, platforms, splits, and support.
5. Read the distributor terms for term length, rights granted, and extras before agreeing.
6. Upload the finished master and artwork well ahead of release day, leaving buffer days for corrections.
7. After delivery, check how the release appears in the distributor's system and save all confirmation details and codes in your release folder.

A Worked Example

The band Low Signal prepares their EP. Their first artwork draft is a beautiful, detailed illustration — which, shrunk to thumbnail size on the singer's phone, becomes unreadable mush with their name invisible. They redesign: one bold image, name in large plain type, tested at small size on three phones before approval. Their metadata sheet catches two errors before upload: the featured vocalist on track three was listed in the track title (which would have split the release across artist pages under some platform rules their distributor warns about) and one songwriter's surname was spelled differently than on the band's song log — the spelling that must match for payments. Distributor choice: they compare three services in a simple table. One charges per release with no yearly fee but pays quarterly above a threshold; one charges yearly for unlimited releases but removes music if the subscription lapses — a fact that decides them, with a small catalog and irregular income, toward the per-release service where releases stay live. Upload happens four weeks before release day. The distributor flags one track title

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containing a character their system rejects; with buffer, Low Signal fixes it in a day instead of losing the date. Release day, when it comes, is quiet in the best way: everything was already where it belonged.

Common Mistakes

- **Designing artwork for a poster, not a phone.** If the name cannot be read at thumbnail size, the artwork fails at its actual job.
- **Using images found online.** "Found it on the internet" is not a right. Unlicensed artwork gets releases taken down.
- **Rushing metadata at upload.** Artist-name variations, title errors, and wrong explicit markings are the cockroaches of a catalog — they survive everything and multiply.
- **Choosing a distributor on price alone.** What happens when you stop paying, how splits are handled, and whether support answers are worth more than a small price difference.
- **Uploading at the last minute.** Processing and corrections take real days. Last-minute uploads forfeit pitching and invite a missed date.

Lesson 3 — Building a Release Timeline That Actually Works

Amateur releases run forward from excitement: song finished Monday, announced Tuesday, out Friday, forgotten by the next Friday. Professional releases run backward from a date: release day is fixed only after the finished master exists, and every task is placed on the calendar by counting back the lead time it truly needs. A timeline is not bureaucracy. It is how a one-person operation gives editors, playlist curators, venues, collaborators, and their own future self enough notice to actually help.

Work with a standard shape, then adjust it to your scale. **Six to four weeks before release:** master finished and approved; artwork done; metadata sheet complete; distributor upload submitted; release pitched to the streaming platforms' own editorial tools where your distributor provides access (these pitches typically require the song delivered and pitched at least a week or more before release — earlier is better, and an unreleased, delivered song is a requirement, which is another reason upload cannot be last-minute). **Four to three weeks before:** press and radio outreach begins with the finished materials — a release that journalists can actually hear privately, artwork, a short biography, and the story of this song; live dates around release are booked and confirmed; content batch one is made (Lesson 4). **Two weeks before:** pre-save or pre-order campaign runs for listeners who want the song the moment it lands; collaborator and featured-artist posts are agreed with dates; venue and community announcements go out. **Release week:** content focuses, live tie-ins happen, and you personally tell your closest supporters — the message from the artist still outperforms every advertisement. **After release:** the follow-through weeks of Lesson 5, planned now, not improvised later.

Build the timeline as a real calendar, not a vibe. Each task gets an owner and a date. If you are the whole team, the owner is you — which makes dates more important, not less, because nobody else will notice a slipped task. Include the unglamorous tasks with the exciting ones: verify artist profiles on the platforms and claim any you have not claimed; update your

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biography, photos, and links everywhere the release will send people; prepare the song's link hub so every post points to one tidy page; line up your email list or messaging list announcement; confirm that featured artists and co-writers have the date, the link, and the exact credit wording, so their posts help instead of confusing.

Choose the release day and date with eyes open. New music floods platforms on certain days of the week; smaller artists sometimes find quieter days kinder, and sometimes matching the industry rhythm matters for press. There is no magic day — there is only a day your timeline can serve properly. Respect seasons and your own life: a release competing with your busiest work month, a family event, or three other local artists' album launches will get the leftover energy of everyone involved. And protect the date once set. Moving a date costs credibility with every editor, venue, and collaborator who planned around it. If a true emergency forces a move, tell partners early and once, with the new date — do not let them discover it.

Finally, write the timeline where you will see it daily, and review it in a short weekly check during the campaign: what is done, what is late, what needs a decision. Ten minutes a week keeps a six-week campaign from becoming a six-alarm fire.

The Steps

1. Fix the release date only after the final master, artwork, and metadata sheet are complete.
2. Count backward and place the major blocks: upload and platform pitching, press outreach, content batches, pre-save period, release week, follow-through weeks.
3. Give every task an owner and a date on a real calendar, including profile updates, link setup, and collaborator coordination.
4. Book and confirm any live dates tied to the release during the planning stage, not the week before.
5. Confirm featured artists and co-writers have the date, credit wording, and link plan in writing.
6. Hold a ten-minute weekly timeline review during the campaign; move tasks openly, never silently.
7. Protect the date: change it only for genuine emergencies, and notify every partner early, once, with the new date.

A Worked Example

Rapper and producer J. Mensah plans his single "Night Bus." Master approved March 1. He chooses Friday, April 11 as release day — six weeks out — and builds backward. March 7: upload submitted to his distributor with artwork and metadata; the same day, using the distributor's pitching tool, he pitches the unreleased song for platform editorial consideration with a short, factual pitch: genre, mood, his city, his growing local audience, and the live show planned for release weekend. March 14: press pack sent to twelve local blogs, campus radio stations, and community shows he has actually listened to, each message personal in its first line. March 21: content batch one filmed in one afternoon (Lesson 4's method). March 28: pre-save link live; his email list hears the story of the song. April 4: collaborators confirm their

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release-week posts; the venue confirms the release show. Release week runs from the calendar, not from adrenaline: announcement post, show, thank-you post with the link. His weekly ten-minute reviews catch exactly two problems in six weeks — a late artwork export and a radio station that needed the clean edit — both fixed while they were small. The single does not make him famous. It does something better: it performs noticeably above his last release on every measure he tracks, and the entire campaign fits in a folder he reuses for the next single. The timeline, not luck, is the reusable asset.

Common Mistakes

- **Announcing a date before the song is finished.** Every promise made on an unfinished song is a debt. Finish first, date second.
- **Counting lead times in hope instead of days.** "The distributor is probably fast" is not a plan. Use stated processing times plus buffer.
- **Planning only up to release day.** A campaign that ends at midnight on release day abandons the song in its most important weeks. Plan the follow-through now.
- **Keeping the timeline in your head.** A one-person team with an unwritten timeline is a team where every task is a surprise. Calendar, owners, dates.
- **Moving the date casually.** Each silent or late change spends trust with editors, venues, and collaborators that took months to earn.

Lesson 4 — Pitching Playlists and Press Honestly, and Social Content That Serves the Song

Promotion is where integrity and effectiveness meet — and where they are most often traded away. The honest methods in this lesson are not a noble sacrifice. They are the methods that still work in six months. Bought streams, fake followers, bot comments, and pay-to-playlist schemes that guarantee placements violate platform rules, produce listeners who do not exist, poison the data you will read in Lesson 5, and can end with music removed and accounts banned. Real promotion is slower and compounds: the editor who trusts your pitches, the audience that actually shows up, the algorithm trained on genuine saves and shares. Build that.

Pitching playlists has two honest channels. The first is the platforms' own editorial pitching, done through your distributor or artist account before release: one song pitched per release cycle, with accurate genre and mood information, a concise description of the song and the artist's real story and plans, and no exaggeration. Editors can smell inflated claims, and accuracy is a competitive advantage — a song pitched as the right fit for the right playlist beats a song pitched as a guaranteed hit for every playlist. The second channel is independent curators and user playlists: research who actually programs playlists in your genre and size range, listen to what they select, and write a short, specific pitch — who you are, the song in one line, why it fits this playlist, the release date, and a listening link. Accept "no" and silence gracefully; both are normal at every level, and a polite pitcher gets heard next release.

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Pitching press and radio runs on the same principles. Build a modest, researched list: local papers and blogs, genre sites, campus and community radio, podcasts in your world. Send a complete, small package: one-paragraph introduction tailored to the outlet, the song (private listening link before release, public link after), artwork, a short biography, the release date, live dates, and one good photo. Journalists and DJs are busy people doing you a favor by listening; make listening easy and make your facts checkable. Follow up once, briefly, after a reasonable interval. Never pay for coverage disguised as editorial, never invent quotes, chart positions, or numbers, and never send mass messages that pretend to be personal. When coverage comes, thank the person, share it accurately, and record the contact and result in your release records — your press list is an asset that grows release by release.

Social content around a release should be planned in batches and built from the truth of the music. Effective release content falls into honest families: the story of the song (what it is about, a line that matters, where it was written); the making (studio moments, drafts, the instrument, the room); the people (collaborators, the producer, the audience at a show); the invitation (pre-save, release day, the live date); and the gratitude (thank-yous, shared fan responses with permission, milestones stated truthfully). Film and photograph in one or two batch sessions per campaign — a phone, decent light, quiet room — and schedule posts across the timeline instead of creating daily under pressure. Write captions in your own voice, put the listening link where your profile makes it findable, and answer real comments like a person. Measure content by saves, shares, and link taps from real people, not by purchased numbers. And keep the epilepsy-safe, calm standard that good practice demands everywhere: no flashing or strobing effects in videos or visuals — they endanger real viewers and add nothing the music needs.

One more honesty rule governs all of it: state only what is true. Not "the new hit single," but "my new single." Not invented chart claims, but the real milestone when it happens. Audiences forgive modest numbers. They do not forgive being misled — and neither do the editors deciding whether your next pitch gets opened.

The Steps

1. Pitch one song through the official platform editorial tool before release, with accurate genre, mood, story, and plans.
2. Build a researched list of independent playlists, press, radio, and podcasts that genuinely fit your music and size.
3. Prepare a small press package: tailored intro, listening link, artwork, short bio, release date, live dates, one photo.
4. Write short, specific pitches; follow up once; accept refusals and silence without argument.
5. Batch-create social content in one or two sessions across the honest families: story, making, people, invitation, gratitude.
6. Schedule content across the timeline, keep the link findable, reply to real comments, and never buy streams, followers, or placements.
7. Record every pitch, contact, and result in the release records for the next campaign.

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A Worked Example

Folk duo The Calder Sisters release their single "Wintering." Their promotion budget is zero dollars and about six hours a week. They pitch through the platform tool three weeks early, describing the song truthfully: close-harmony folk, recorded in one room, for playlists built around quiet acoustic music. To independent curators they send eleven pitches — eleven, not eleven hundred — each naming a song already on that playlist that sits well beside theirs. Two curators add the song. Their press list is nine outlets: the regional paper that covered their first show, two folk blogs, campus radio in three towns they tour, a local music podcast, and two community newsletters. The package is complete and small; the paper runs a short interview, campus radio plays the clean master, the podcast books them for a session. Content is batched on one Sunday: six short videos — the story of the lyric, the harmony part slowed down, their grandmother's kitchen where they rehearse, the pre-save invitation, a live chorus from a house concert, and a thank-you filmed after release. Nothing flashes, nothing is bought, every claim is true. Release month ends with modest, real numbers — and a press list, a curator list, and an audience that measurably grew and will still be there for the album. That is what honest promotion buys: not a spike, but a slope.

Common Mistakes

- **Buying streams, followers, or guaranteed playlist placements.** Fake engagement violates platform rules, risks removal, and trains every system on listeners who do not exist.
- **Pitching everyone everything.** A metal curator pitched a lullaby learns to ignore your name. Research fit; pitch narrow and true.
- **Sending press a puzzle.** No link, no date, no bio, a huge attachment — busy editors delete puzzles. Complete, small, and easy wins the listen.
- **Inventing numbers and titles.** "Charting," "viral," "hit" — false claims are checkable in seconds and end relationships permanently.
- **Posting in a panic daily instead of batching.** Daily improvisation produces frantic, repetitive content and an exhausted artist. Batch, schedule, live your life.

Lesson 5 — Release Day, Live Tie-Ins, Reading Results, and What Comes Next

Release day feels like a finish line. Treat it as a midpoint. The song's first weeks decide its long life — whether platforms keep recommending it, whether listeners save it for their own collections, whether the next release starts from a higher floor. This lesson covers the day itself, the power of live performance around a release, how to read your numbers like a grown-up, and the follow-through that turns one release into a career pattern.

Release day, run calmly. Verify before you announce: open each major platform, confirm the song is live, plays correctly, carries the right title, credits, and artwork, and sits on the correct artist page. Wrong-page and wrong-version releases happen; catching one before your announcement post is the difference between a support ticket and a public mess. Then announce once, clearly, everywhere you planned: the post with the link, the story, the email or

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message to your list. Thank early listeners by name where you can. Spend the day present — replying, sharing genuine responses with permission, playing the live tie-in if scheduled — not refreshing statistics hourly. Day-one numbers are weather, not climate.

Live tie-ins multiply a release because a room full of people hearing a song live, then finding it that night, produces the deepest listening there is. The classic shapes: a release show in release week (play the new song where the audience can cheer it, sell or give the link simply, put the song where the set makes it land); a small tour or run of dates in the following month with the release as the headline story; live sessions for radio, podcasts, or video that keep appearing after release week; and community performances — schools, libraries, faith and neighborhood spaces where your audience actually lives — that national campaigns cannot buy. At every performance, make the connection effortless: say the song's name and where to find it, once, clearly; have the link or code visible; and capture the audience's information honestly (an email list sign-up they chose) so the next release starts with them already invited.

Reading results requires knowing what the numbers mean. Platforms report streams, listeners (how many distinct people), saves and library adds (a listener choosing to keep the song — among the strongest signals of real attachment), playlist adds, shares, and follower changes; stores report sales; your distributor reports earnings by platform and period, always later than the listening. Read in this order: saves and shares per listener tell you whether the song connects; listener count tells you reach; repeat listening and follower growth tell you whether reach is converting into audience. Compare against your own previous releases, not against stars: a song that doubles your last release's saves is a success your next release can build on, whatever its raw size. Beware the two reading errors: despair at honest small numbers (every durable audience began there) and intoxication at one spike (a playlist placement that sends listeners who never save or follow is rented attention — enjoy it, learn from it, do not plan around it).

What comes next is decided in a short post-release review, two to four weeks after release day, written into the release folder: What did we plan, what actually happened, what do the numbers say, what did partners and press do, what will the next release repeat and change? Then execute the follow-through: pitch the song's next angle (a live version, an acoustic version, a video, a story placement) while it is still fresh; keep performing it; keep it in your profiles' featured spots while it is your best door into the catalog; and let its lessons set the next release's timeline. Songs have long lives when artists work them patiently. The catalog you are building, release by honest release, is the asset. No single day — good or bad — is the story.

The Steps

1. On release morning, verify the release on each platform — live, correct version, credits, artwork, right artist page — before announcing anything.
2. Announce once and clearly across planned channels; send the personal message to your closest supporters; stay present for replies, not statistics.
3. Run the live tie-ins: release-week show, following-month dates, sessions, and community performances, with the song's name and link made effortless at each.

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4. Track the meaningful numbers weekly: saves and shares per listener, listener reach, follower growth, and distributor earnings when they arrive.

5. Compare results to your own previous releases, and name honestly what was real growth, what was a spike, and what fell short.

6. Hold a written post-release review at two to four weeks: plan versus reality, lessons, and the next release's changes.

7. Work the follow-through: next-angle pitches, continued performance, featured placement, and the next timeline started from this one's lessons.

A Worked Example

Country artist Bea Lawson releases "County Line Hymn" on a Friday. At 7 a.m. she verifies: one platform has placed the single on a similarly named artist's page. Because she checks before announcing, a support request with her distributor's documentation goes in at 7:20, the placement is corrected by early afternoon, and her announcement — held, calmly — goes out once, correct everywhere, at 3 p.m. Her release show that night is in the hall where she first sang publicly; she plays the new song twice, once mid-set and once as the closer, names it and where to hear it, and watches her email list grow by a third at the door table. Over four weeks she reads her dashboard weekly, not daily: listener reach is triple her last single (the playlist add from Lesson 4's honest pitching helped), but the number she celebrates in her review is saves — nearly half her listeners saved the song, double her previous rate, telling her the song itself is the strongest she has released. The review also records honestly that press outreach underperformed: two of nine outlets responded, and her follow-up went out late. Next release's timeline moves press two weeks earlier and adds the radio session that worked this time. Six weeks after release she releases the live recording from the release show as the song's second angle, pitched to the same curators with fresh news. "County Line Hymn" is not a hit. It is a foundation stone, measured, learned from, and still being worked — which is how catalogs, and careers, are actually built.

Common Mistakes

• **Announcing before verifying.** A wrong-page or wrong-version release announced to everyone multiplies the error. Check first, post second.

• **Judging the release by day one.** Day one is weather. Saves, repeat listening, and follower growth over weeks are the climate that matters.

• **Comparing yourself to stars instead of your last release.** Their numbers teach you nothing actionable. Your own trend line teaches you everything.

• **No live connection.** A release with no performance around it asks the internet to do all the work. Rooms full of real people remain the strongest promotion ever built.

• **Vanishing after release week.** No review, no follow-through, no next angle — the song is abandoned exactly when patient work would compound it.

Try It — Run a Complete Mini Release

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Choose one real song — finished or nearly — and run the whole system at a small scale, on a six-week calendar, exactly as the lessons order it.

Week zero is finishing: complete Lesson 1's checklist — approved final mix, master, instrumental and clean versions if needed, one file-naming pattern, backed-up release folder, and a credits sheet verified name by name with every person on it. Do not choose the date until this week is done.

Next, complete Lesson 2: artwork designed and tested at thumbnail size with rights confirmed in writing, a metadata sheet checked by a second pair of eyes, and a distributor chosen from a written comparison of at least three. Upload with buffer, and save every confirmation in the release folder.

Then build Lesson 3's backward timeline on a real calendar: upload and platform pitch, press list and packages, content batch days, pre-save start, release week, and the post-release review date — every task dated. Claim and tidy your artist profiles and link page this week too.

In the campaign weeks, execute Lesson 4: pitch through the official tool, send your small researched press and curator pitches with the complete package, batch your content in one session across the five honest families, and schedule it. Book at least one live tie-in, however small — a set, a session, a community performance — inside release week or the week after.

On release day, verify before announcing, announce once and clearly, and be present. For four weeks after, read your numbers weekly, work one follow-through angle, and close with Lesson 5's written review in the release folder: plan versus reality, what the saves and listeners say, and the three changes your next release will make.

Keep the folder. It is now your release system — proven once, by you, on a real song — and every future release starts from it instead of from zero.

Fortress shares what I learned, not professional advice.

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