

Music Publishers and What They Do

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By Todd Brabec, ASCAP Executive VP of Membership and Jeff Brabec

When a songwriter assigns a song to a music publisher, the publisher can help in a number of ways. One of the primary roles of the publisher is to secure commercially released recordings, CDs, and tapes of the songs it controls. The publisher must have an effective staff of professional managers (those who actually promote the songs) who not only know what artists are recording and the type of material needed for a particular session, but who also have a good working relationship with record company A&R executives, producers, recording artists, and managers. After a song has been initially recorded and released, the publisher will try to secure commitments from other recording artists or producers to include the composition on future albums or singles.

Another necessary and important service provided by the publisher is that of proper administration of musical compositions: registering copyrights, filing necessary information to mechanical and performing rights organizations, auditing record companies and other licensees, bookkeeping, negotiating licenses, and collecting monies due. Considering the complexity of the music industry, the hundreds of thousands of music users throughout the world, the lack of detail on many royalty statements from licensees, and the amounts of money involved (\$250,000 to \$1 million is not unusual for a worldwide hit song), this service is vital.

Another important area of concentration is the promotion of songs for television series, made-for-TV movies, and theatrical motion pictures. Standard and contemporary songs are a mainstay of these media, and whether the song is used as a theme, background music, or actually sung or performed on camera, the writer's and publisher's earnings can be substantial. An important activity for the publisher is the promotion of songs for use as part of advertising campaigns.

Many publishers have taken on the new responsibility of securing recording contracts for their songwriters. In many cases, the publisher may be responsible for producing the actual finished recording. In others, the publisher finances an elaborate demo featuring a number of its writer performer's songs so that a record company can hear the commercial potential of the writer as a recording artist and sign the writer to a record deal.

An important responsibility of the publisher is protecting its copyrights and enforcing the exclusive rights that it has been granted by the songwriter and the copyright laws. Considering the number of actual and potential users of songs throughout the world (record companies, film producers, television companies, web sites, video distributors, book publishers, sheet music firms, magazines, video and audio sing-along booths, jukebox operators, restaurants, retail stores, theatrical productions), the good publisher will spend a great deal of time and money to ensure that its songs are not used without permission and compensation.

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For more information, check out the book ***Music, Money and Success: The Insider's Guide To Making Money In The Music Business*** (Schirmer Trade Books/Music Sales/502 pages) available for sale at Amazon.com, Barnes & Noble, Borders, Music Sales Group and www.musicandmoney.com.

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