

# Distribution Guide

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A plain-English guide to getting your music onto streaming platforms and stores. Written for an independent artist/manager in the house & tech-house lane (so Beatport and Traxsource matter as much as Spotify).

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## What a Distributor Actually Does

A distributor is the pipe between your finished master and the stores. They:

- **Deliver your audio + artwork + metadata** to DSPs (Spotify, Apple Music, Amazon, YouTube Music, Tidal, Deezer) and download/specialist stores (Beatport, Traxsource, iTunes).
- **Assign codes** — they generate a free UPC for the release and free ISRCs for each track (unless you bring your own).
- **Collect your royalties** from every platform and pay them out to you, usually monthly, with a statement.
- **Provide pitching tools** — access to Spotify for Artists pitching, sometimes editorial relationships, and store-front consideration.
- **Handle takedowns, updates, and re-deliveries** when metadata is wrong or you want to pull a release.
- **Register with YouTube Content ID** so user-generated videos using your track get monetized.

A distributor is **not** a record label and **not** a publisher. They move your recordings and collect recording (master) royalties from stores. They generally do **not** collect your songwriter/publishing royalties or your SoundExchange royalties — you handle those separately (see the ISRC/UPC and New Release guides).

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## Digital vs. Physical Distribution

**Digital distribution** is the default and where ~99% of an electronic artist's income and reach lives: - Streaming (Spotify, Apple, Amazon, YouTube Music, Tidal, Deezer) - Download stores (Beatport, Traxsource, iTunes/Apple) - Short-form/UGC platforms (TikTok, Instagram/Reels, Reels music libraries)

**Physical distribution** = getting CDs or vinyl into shops and onto Amazon/online retailers. For a house/tech-house artist this is mostly a **vinyl** question — a limited 12" pressing for collectors and DJs, sold direct (Bandcamp), through a vinyl-focused distributor, or via the label. Physical is a branding/superfan play, not a volume play: - Vinyl pressing runs realistically **\$1,500–\$5,000+** for a few hundred 12"s (plates, test pressings, jackets, freight). - Lead times are long — **8–16+ weeks** at the plant is common. - Margins are thin unless you sell direct. Treat it as merch/collectible, not core revenue.

For most releases: go **digital-first**, and add vinyl only when there's a clear superfan/DJ demand or a label co-release.

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## How to Pick a Distributor

There's no single "best" — it depends on volume, whether you run a label, and how much hands-on support you want.

### Self-serve, flat-fee or per-release

- **DistroKid** — annual subscription, unlimited releases, keep 100% of royalties. Fast delivery, good for high-output artists who drop often. Add-ons (custom label name, YouTube Content ID, etc.) cost extra. Great default for a single-artist, frequent-release workflow.
- **TuneCore** — per-release or subscription pricing, keep 100% of royalties, strong reporting and publishing-admin add-on. Solid if you want detailed accounting.
- **CD Baby** — per-release one-time fee, keep the bulk of royalties (small cut on some lines), offers physical/CD and sync/publishing services. Good if you don't want a recurring subscription and might do physical.

### Artist-services / deal-style

- **UnitedMasters** — free and paid tiers; free tier takes a revenue share, paid tier lets you keep more. Pitches itself on brand/sync partnerships and a more "services" feel. Good if you want deal flow and brand placements, less ideal if you want pure flat-fee simplicity.
- **Symphonic Distribution** — more of a **label-style / boutique** distributor. Revenue-share model, but with real human support, electronic-music relationships, Beatport/Traxsource strength, playlist and marketing services, and label-account features. Strong fit for a house/tech-house label like Greyscale running multiple artists.

### Label-style / "open label" options

If you're running Greyscale as a label (multiple artists, catalog, your own imprint on Beatport), look at distributors built for labels: **Symphonic, Label Engine, FUGA-powered services, The Orchard / AWAL (more selective)**. These give you a label account, sub-label structure, advance/marketing potential, and dedicated Beatport label pages — at the cost of a revenue share instead of a flat fee.

### Quick decision rule

- **One artist, drops a lot, wants simple + cheap:** DistroKid.
  - **Want detailed accounting / publishing add-on:** TuneCore.
  - **Don't want a subscription / might do physical:** CD Baby.
  - **Want brand/sync deal flow:** UnitedMasters.
  - **Running a label, electronic-focused, want support + Beatport muscle:** Symphonic or another label-style distributor.
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## Royalty Splits & Fees — How You Actually Get Paid

Two cost models:

1. **Flat fee / subscription (DistroKid, TuneCore, CD Baby):** You pay upfront (annual or per-release) and **keep ~100% of net royalties**. The platform takes no cut of your streaming income (CD Baby takes a small percentage on a few lines). Best when you have volume and want to maximize per-stream income.
2. **Revenue share (UnitedMasters free tier, Symphonic, most label-style distributors):** Lower or no upfront cost, but they keep a **percentage of royalties** — commonly **10–20%** for a services/label distributor, in exchange for support, pitching, and infrastructure. Worth it when the support/relationships drive more revenue than the cut costs you.

What “royalties” means here: the distributor collects the **recording/master** royalties stores pay (per-stream micro-payments, download sale shares, etc.), nets out their fee, and pays you per their schedule (typically monthly, often with a 1–2 month lag from when stores report).

Reminder — this is only ONE of your income streams. You still separately collect: - **Songwriter/publishing royalties** (PRO + publishing admin), - **SoundExchange** non-interactive digital performance royalties, - **Sync** licensing income.

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## Delivery Lead Times — Don’t Cut This Close

Build your release calendar around delivery timing:

- **Minimum to go live:** most distributors can deliver in a few days to ~2 weeks, but don’t rely on the floor.
- **For normal store placement:** deliver **1–3 weeks** before street date.
- **For Spotify editorial consideration:** your release must be in the distributor and pitched **at least 7 days before** release via Spotify for Artists — practically, aim for **3–4 weeks**.
- **For Beatport/Traxsource features and DJ promo cycles:** **3–4+ weeks** so the record can be serviced to DJs and considered for store features.
- **Vinyl/physical:** **8–16+ weeks** at the plant — completely separate, much longer timeline.

Rule of thumb: **deliver 3–4 weeks before release**. It costs nothing extra and protects every pitch you’re making.

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## Metadata You Must Supply

Get this right once and reuse the template. Bad metadata = duplicate artist profiles, missing credits, lost royalties.

**Release-level:** - Release/album title (or single title) - Primary artist name (exact spelling/casing as on existing profiles) - Label name (e.g., Greyscale Music Group) - Release date + original release date (if a re-release) - UPC/EAN (auto-assigned by distributor unless you bring your own) - Genre / subgenre - Artwork (3000x3000 px, RGB, JPG/PNG — no logos, URLs, or unlicensed imagery) - (P) line and (C) line with year and owner

**Track-level (per song):** - Track title + version (Original Mix / Extended Mix / Radio Edit) - Featured artists - ISRC (auto-assigned unless you bring your own) - Songwriter **legal names** (required for publishing — not stage names) - Producer / remixer credits - Explicit or clean flag - Language (or “Instrumental”) - Audio file: 24-bit / 44.1kHz WAV recommended (16-bit/44.1 minimum)

**Where you pick distribution scope:** - Territories (almost always Worldwide) - Stores (select ALL DSPs + Beatport and Traxsource for house/tech-house) - Pre-save / pre-order date if running one

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## Bottom line

Pick the distributor that matches your output and support needs, deliver **3–4 weeks early**, supply clean metadata with legal songwriter names, and remember the distributor only collects your **master** royalties — your PRO, publishing admin, and SoundExchange registrations are separate jobs you must do for every release.