

Beyond the License:

The *Playbook* for Enterprise Soundtracking





Introduction

In the modern digital enterprise, content is the currency of customer engagement – and music is its emotional heartbeat. Research from [Ipsos](#) confirms the substantial business impact of a strategic approach to audio, revealing a significant yet largely untapped competitive advantage.

The data is compelling. Ads featuring sonic brand cues are 8.5× more likely to be top performers, yet only 6% of ads use them. Despite the proven impact of branded audio on consumer recall and purchase intent, the vast majority of advertising still leaves this lever untouched.

A robust music licensing strategy is not merely about compliance; it is a foundational component of building and protecting high-value brand assets. This playbook provides the essential framework to capitalize on the power of sound, drive measurable business results, and secure a distinct competitive edge in the global marketplace.

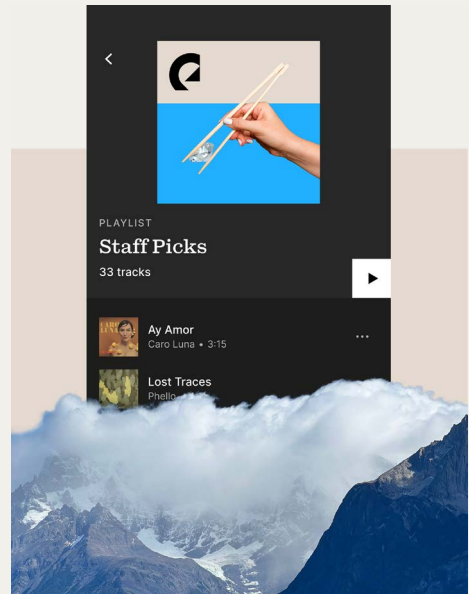




Understanding your Music Licensing Options

The music licensing landscape is inherently complex. A single track contains multiple intellectual property rights, and has traditionally been fragmented both by use case and geography. Securing all relevant rights for a global campaign – public performance rights included – can involve hundreds of rights holders. That complexity is now amplified by new vendor types and the rise of generative AI, while financial and legal risks grow in line with the scale of modern content creation.

Enterprises may use a mix of the following options depending on the need:



1. Major-label music

Using popular songs from well-known artists

Benefit:

High brand recognition for major campaigns.

Risk:

Exceptionally expensive and legally complex, requiring separate negotiations with multiple parties for licenses that are often limited by time, territory, and platform. Licensing a single well-known track typically costs \$25,000–\$250,000, with marquee songs exceeding \$500,000.

2. "Royalty-free" libraries

The most common model, but widely misunderstood

Benefit:

A simple, upfront licensing fee for the right to use music in content.

Risk:

Licenses often exclude public performance royalties, leading to unexpected back-end fees, administrative burdens, and legal claims from collection societies (ASCAP, BMI, PRS, SACEM, GEMA).



3. Platform-native libraries

Convenient, but with hidden risks

Benefit:

Fast access to music directly within the platform.

Risk:

Platform music libraries (TikTok, Instagram, YouTube) can come with a number of constraints to be aware of. Key issues include:

- ▶ No cross-platform clearance: cross-posting content to another platform violates the originating platform's library terms.
- ▶ Rights can vanish overnight: when Universal Music Group's TikTok deal expired in February 2024, all UMG music was pulled from the platform – including from already-published videos.
- ▶ Limited legal safety: platform libraries act as aggregators and may contain tracks that are not fully cleared. Their terms typically provide no warranties and no indemnification.
- ▶ No audit trail: brands have close to zero visibility into what music influencers use in platform-native content. No compliance reporting, no audit trail.
- ▶ Duration limits: TikTok's in-app commercial music library caps usage at 60 seconds per video. Longer content requires external editing and separate licensing.
- ▶ Geographic restrictions: music availability can differ by territory, meaning global campaigns cannot rely on consistent access.

4. Custom composition

Hiring a composer to create a unique track

Benefit:

Maximum creative control and potential to own music as a brand asset.

Risk:

Time-consuming and costly; best reserved for high-value, specific projects.



5.

Generative AI music

Creating music instantly using artificial intelligence

Benefit:

Unparalleled speed, often at low cost.

Risk:

Significant legal and ethical uncertainty, including potential copyright infringement from training data, content blocked by platforms, and reputational damage from sidelining human artists.

6.

The all-in-one partner model

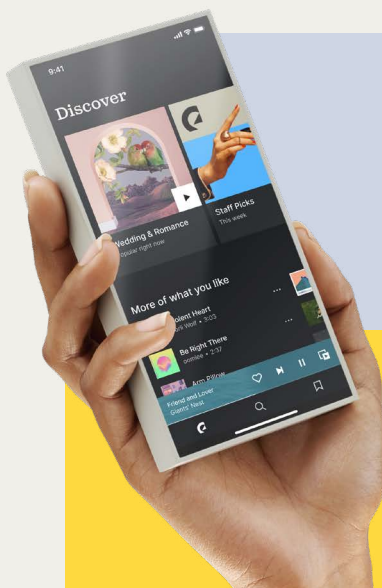
A direct licensing approach

Benefit:

Complete peace of mind. A single partner that owns all rights – including performance rights – and indemnifies you against claims enables global, scalable content creation with minimal legal or administrative burden.

Risk:

High dependency on a single vendor. If the library is creatively limiting or service is unreliable, your content strategy is exposed. Choosing the right long-term partner is critical.



Using music without the correct license can result in takedowns, demonetization, retroactive fees, and lawsuits. Music licensing and copyright compliance consistently rank among the top pain points for enterprise content teams – a challenge that intensifies as content volumes and distribution channels multiply.



Common Pitfalls

Liability at scale

The line between personal and commercial content has blurred, particularly in influencer marketing. Brands are increasingly held liable for copyright infringement not only on their own channels, but also for music used by influencers, agencies, and other third parties. Platforms' general libraries carry significant risk, as their terms often do not cover all rights required for commercial use.

The hidden risks of AI

Generative AI introduces a new layer of legal uncertainty: models may be trained on copyrighted material without permission, and AI-generated music can infringe if it resembles protected works. A majority of creators now use AI tools in music production, and the legal frameworks governing AI-generated content remain unsettled – meaning the risk of accidental infringement at scale is escalating while the law catches up.

Fragmented rights

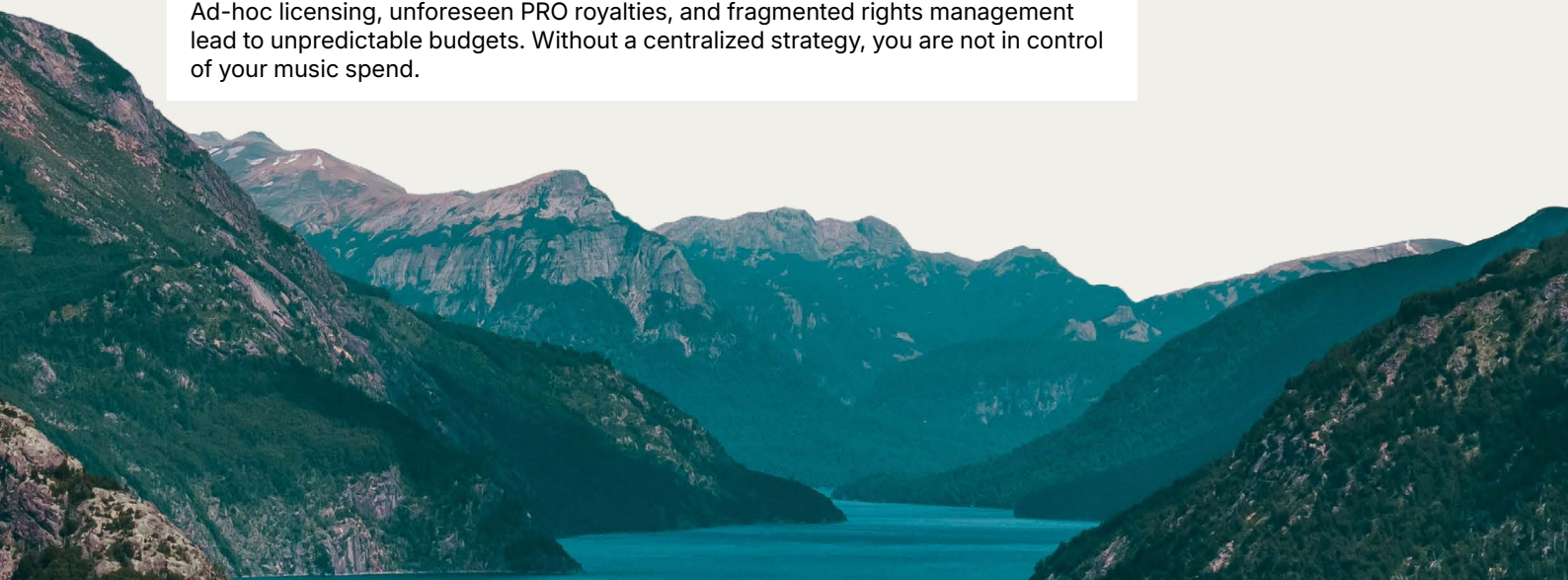
Traditional licensing was built for listeners (radio, streaming), not content creators. Clearing rights from multiple stakeholders – labels, publishers, PROs – across multiple platforms is slow, expensive, and administratively burdensome.

Failing to cut through the noise

Speed is everything. Time spent finding the right track, adapting it, and navigating rights clearance means lost opportunities. Creators who take shortcuts – following trends or pulling music from unvetted sources – dilute their brand's voice and produce content that disappears into the feed.

Uncontrolled and escalating costs

Ad-hoc licensing, unforeseen PRO royalties, and fragmented rights management lead to unpredictable budgets. Without a centralized strategy, you are not in control of your music spend.





Enforcement is Increasing

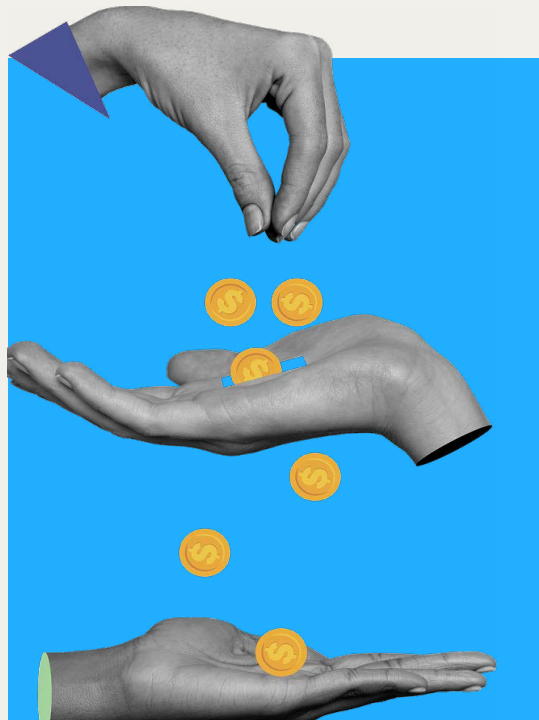
Major labels and rights holders are ramping up enforcement, leveraging AI-powered tools to identify infringement at scale and pursuing claims against major brands for social media posts published as far back as 10+ years ago.

Recent cases illustrate the scale of exposure:

Year filed	Defendant	Plaintiff	Allegations & platforms	Damages sought	Outcome
2023	OFRA Cosmetics	Sony Music	Sony sued the beauty brand for over 329 social media videos using tracks by Mariah Carey, Britney Spears, and Harry Styles. Critically, the legal theory held OFRA directly liable for content created by influencers that OFRA had reviewed, selected, and reposted – establishing brand liability for influencer-generated content.	Potential exposure ~\$50 million.	Case terminated in January 2025.
2024	Marriott International	Sony Music	Sony sued Marriott for using 931 unlicensed recordings across its social media channels. Sony had notified Marriott of infringing content for over four years before filing suit.	Potential statutory exposure exceeding \$139 million.	Settled in October 2024 with terms confidential.
2024	14 NBA Teams (e.g., Knicks, Cavaliers)	Multiple rightsholders (e.g., Artist Publishing Group)	Use of live popular music from stadium sound systems in social media highlight clips without a sync license.	Plaintiffs sought statutory damages “in the tens of millions.”	Multiple lawsuits filed in July 2024. Defense is actively challenging the “discovery rule” in court. Status ongoing.
2025	DSW (Designer Shoe Warehouse)	Warner Music Group (WMG) & Sony Music Entertainment (SME)	Separate lawsuits alleging “massive” and “rampant” infringement of over 200 WMG tracks and 122 SME recordings, used directly and via paid influencers on TikTok and Instagram.	WMG is seeking up to \$30+ million; SME is seeking an unspecified amount for at least 170 unauthorized video promotions.	WMG lawsuit filed in May 2025; SME lawsuit filed in August 2025. Both status ongoing.
2025	University of Southern California	Sony Music Entertainment (SME)	Infringement of 170+ unlicensed Sony recordings in 283 promotional videos on TikTok and Instagram since 2021.	Up to \$42.45 million in statutory damages.	Settled in March 2026.
2025	Crumb! Cookies	Warner Music Group (WMG)	At least 159 WMG recordings and compositions on TikTok and Instagram, including hits from Lizzo and Coldplay.	Up to \$23.85 million in statutory damages.	Lawsuit filed in April 2025. Status ongoing.



The Real Cost of a *Single Mistake*



Under U.S. Copyright Law statutory damages for willful infringement can reach up to \$150,000 per work infringed – the statutory maximum, which courts have discretion to award (17 U.S.C. § 504).

Consider a common scenario: a brand publishes one video on YouTube, cuts five short clips for TikTok and Instagram, then partners with 20 influencers who each use the tracks from the platform libraries not licensed for commercial use. That single campaign creates 26 separate potential infringements – a theoretical maximum exposure of \$3.9 million before legal fees or reputational damage. While courts rarely award the full statutory maximum, even a fraction of this figure represents material financial and operational risk.



How to Use This *Playbook*

This playbook is your strategic guide to safe, high-impact music licensing. It provides a durable framework for evaluating vendors, identifying hidden liabilities, and securing a music solution that is both creatively inspiring and legally sound.

This framework reflects what we at Epidemic Sound believe are the criteria that matter most for enterprise soundtracking – informed by almost two decades of building the licensing model we wished had existed when we started. We encourage you to adjust the weights to reflect your organization’s priorities, and to apply this framework rigorously to every vendor you evaluate – including us.

The evaluation is structured into five weighted categories. Adjust the weights to reflect your organization’s risk tolerance and content volume.



- ▶ **Catalog quality and scope**
- ▶ **Legal & compliance**
- ▶ **Operational efficiency**
- ▶ **Total cost of ownership**
- ▶ **The strategic partnership and ethics**

Category	Recommended weight	Your weight
Catalog quality & scope	30%	
Legal & compliance	30%	
Operational efficiency	15%	
Total cost of ownership (TCO)	15%	
Strategic partnership & ethics	10%	



Scoring Framework

A structured scoring approach serves two purposes: it moves the conversation from subjective musical taste to objective business value, and it creates a defensible record for legal, finance, and procurement leadership.

Score vendors on a 1–5 scale across all five categories

Assessment	Score
Below threshold. Risk level and/or quality insufficient. Do not proceed.	1–2
Adequate for limited, non critical, or complementary use.	3
High quality cost effective catalog.	4
Best in class. A strategic soundtracking partner enabling brand differentiation at speed and with peace of mind.	5





Quick Reference – *Six Questions that Matter*

Use this *checklist* to build your shortlist.

A vendor is worth evaluating further if they offer:

- ☐ **A high-quality, all-in-one catalog**
A curated library of music and sound effects, with stems available for full creative control.
- ☐ **Complete peace of mind**
Financial and legal protection against copyright claims, backed by direct ownership of the music rights.
- ☐ **An all-inclusive, royalty-free license**
A single license that bundles all rights – including public performance – globally, with no hidden royalty fees.
- ☐ **Proactive social media clearing**
Automated content clearance on platforms like YouTube to prevent claims before they disrupt campaigns.
- ☐ **A streamlined creative workflow**
Native integrations with editing software and AI-powered search tools, and music adaptation features to accelerate production.
- ☐ **Dedicated partnership and support**
A true partner with a named point of contact and access to expert music curation services.





Music Licensing by *Epidemic Sound*

To demonstrate how this framework applies in practice, here is how our own solution maps to these criteria:

- ▶ **A high-quality, all-in-one catalog**
A curated music catalog of over 55,000 tracks and over 250,000 studio grade sound effects, with stems included for every track to give you full creative control.
- ▶ **Complete legal peace of mind**
We own 100% of the rights to our music, achieved through direct commissioning and full rights acquisition from artists who are contractually unaffiliated with any Performing Rights Organization (PRO) at the time of creation. This allows us to offer indemnification against copyright claims, designed to keep your work safe.
- ▶ **An all-inclusive, royalty-free license**
Our simple license bundles all necessary rights globally, protecting you from the royalty fees often charged by Performing Rights Organizations (PROs).
- ▶ **Proactive social media clearing**
We prevent social media copyright claims before they happen through automated channel clearing, backed by a dedicated team of experts.
- ▶ **A streamlined creative workflow**
Accelerate your content creation with AI-powered search, track adaptation, and automated soundtrack generation, plus native integrations for major editing software including Adobe Premiere Pro, Final Cut Pro, and DaVinci Resolve.
- ▶ **Dedicated partnership & support**
A true strategic partnership, which includes a dedicated customer success manager for personalized support and access to our expert music curation team.





Category 1

Catalog Quality & Scope (30%)

The question:

Does it elevate your brand, or just fill the silence?

A partner with 30,000 high-quality, relevant tracks is far more valuable than one with 3,000,000 mediocre or hard-to-search files. That said, aim for a minimum of 30,000–40,000 tracks for most enterprise use cases – the largest content producers may need more, where AI-powered adaptation tools or multiple catalogs can bridge the gap.

What best-in-class looks like:

- ▶ A curated, high-quality catalog that fits your sonic brand and delivers genuine emotional impact – including frontline artists with real followings or viral tracks
- ▶ Coverage across the full range of enterprise use cases – advertising, corporate communications, social content, broadcast, and events
- ▶ Stems (separated audio tracks) available for every track; alternate mixes and loops are a plus, provided they are not padded into the catalog count
- ▶ A comprehensive sound effects library included under the same license
- ▶ Access to professional curators who can build playlists against a specific brand brief

Evidence to collect:

- ▶ Ask for the top 10 artists/tracks and their DSP performance, plus how the vendor acquires music and compensates artists
- ▶ Request a custom playlist against a specific brand brief to test curation quality
- ▶ Verify stems are available for the full catalog, not a subset
- ▶ Confirm sound effects are included in the core subscription

Red flags:

- ▶ Marketing leads with “millions of tracks” rather than relevance or usability
- ▶ Only final stereo mixes available – no stems
- ▶ Sound effects require a separate subscription



Category 2

Legal & Compliance (30%)

The question:

Is the content safe to use everywhere, in perpetuity?

In the age of influencer marketing and generative AI, the legal attack surface for enterprises has expanded significantly. A single copyright claim can trigger content takedowns, strikes against corporate social channels, and reputational damage. "Royalty-free" does not mean risk-free if the chain of title is unclear.

What best-in-class looks like:

- ▶ 100% owned catalog: the partner holds the music exclusively, achieved through direct commissioning and full rights acquisition from artists who are contractually unaffiliated with any Performing Rights Organization (PRO) at the time of creation – with a clean chain of title and no third-party aggregators
- ▶ A single license covering synchronisation, mechanical, and public performance rights globally
- ▶ Full IP indemnification covering all provided assets – music, sound effects, and AI-generated output – backed by sufficient insurance and financial stability
- ▶ Proactive social media control, including influencer coverage, to prevent claims before they disrupt campaigns

Evidence to collect:

- ▶ Request warranties confirming 100% rights ownership, including public performance
- ▶ Review the indemnification clause and confirm insurance coverage
- ▶ Ask directly: "Has any customer ever been sued for IP infringement, or been required to settle such a claim?"
- ▶ Ask the vendor to walk through their process for handling a social media copyright claim

Red flags:

- ▶ Aggregated model: music licensed from numerous unknown third parties
- ▶ PRO exclusions in the license
- ▶ No insurance, or evasiveness around claims history
- ▶ No social media control or inadequate claims processes

A note on competitor claims

Several providers market "royalty-free" or "all-rights-included" claims. The evidence-to-collect framework above is designed to test these claims rigorously. In particular, verify whether the provider's PRO-free status is structural (artists are genuinely unaffiliated with any PRO at the time of creation and rights assignment) or contractual (artists attempt to carve out specific tracks while remaining PRO members). The latter approach carries materially higher risk, as PROs in many jurisdictions do not recognize track-level opt-outs and may assert claims regardless of the contractual arrangement between artist and provider.



Category 3

Operational Efficiency (15%)

The question:

Does it speed up production, or create bottlenecks?

If your teams spend hours searching for music, clearing rights, or resolving copyright strikes, your content supply chain slows. The tool must integrate where creatives work – not exist as a standalone silo.

What best-in-class looks like:

- ▶ Native integrations with key tools (e.g. Adobe Premiere Pro, Final Cut Pro, DaVinci Resolve) and API-level access for custom workflows
- ▶ AI-powered search: natural language, search-by-reference, and video-based music suggestion capabilities
- ▶ AI-powered content adaptation: modifying tracks to fit specific needs – changing instrumentation, mood, genre, or length – without manual audio editing
- ▶ Automated soundtrack generation from uploaded video, placing music and sound effects in sync with visual content
- ▶ Proactive allowlisting on YouTube and social channels to prevent false strikes
- ▶ Enterprise-grade SSO and team collaboration features

Evidence to collect:

- ▶ Request a free trial before committing
- ▶ Have a video editor test the plugin – assess whether it is seamless and feature-complete
- ▶ Confirm proactive channel allowlisting and the SLA for resolving a false copyright claim
- ▶ Search for 5–10 tracks using abstract terms or a reference video – time how quickly you reach a relevant result
- ▶ Verify SSO support and API maturity

Red flags:

- ▶ Integrations are non-existent or limited to a basic search bar
- ▶ No proactive allowlisting; support only reacts after a claim has been filed
- ▶ "AI" features are superficial or simply rebadged third-party tools



Category 4

Total Cost of Ownership (15%)

The question:

Are you paying for the license, or the liability?

Focusing on price-per-track is a financial misstep. Traditional models hide costs in back-end PRO royalties (ASCAP, BMI, etc.) and the administrative burden of filing cue sheets for every usage.

What best-in-class looks like:

- ▶ An all-inclusive subscription: sync, mechanical, and performance rights in one predictable fee
- ▶ Zero admin: no cue sheets, no PRO reporting
- ▶ Global rights with no additional fees per territory or channel – and content already produced remains cleared after subscription ends
- ▶ Flat, predictable pricing regardless of volume; variable fees limited to peripheral services such as curation or customization

Evidence to collect:

- ▶ Request a written PRO waiver confirming the catalog is unaffiliated with any PRO/CMO worldwide
- ▶ Verify clear contract language confirming content produced during the license term remains cleared in perpetuity after subscription termination
- ▶ Build a total cost of ownership comparison: subscription fee vs. estimated individual licensing, PRO fees, and admin overhead
- ▶ Confirm pricing terms for expanding to new media types

Red flags:

- ▶ Vendor claims "royalty-free" but the fine print exposes PRO liability
- ▶ Content rights lapse when the subscription ends
- ▶ Contract requires manual cue sheet submission



Category 5

Strategic Partnership & Ethics (10%)

The question:

Are you engaging a soundtracking partner, or just buying a license?

A comprehensive license is table stakes. What differentiates a true partner is financial stability, ethical alignment, and a genuine commitment to the future of creativity.

What best-in-class looks like:

- ▶ A proven track record with enterprise clients and a transparent ownership structure
- ▶ A clear, principled stance on generative AI: how the vendor uses AI (if at all) in music creation, whether AI-generated output is disclosed to customers, and whether AI training used licensed or unlicensed data
- ▶ Sustainable artist compensation – essential not just ethically, but to ensure a continued pipeline of high-quality, original music. Providers that underpay artists face catalog stagnation and reputational risk that transfers to their customers
- ▶ A 360° partner with a clear product roadmap covering all soundtracking services you may need

Evidence to collect:

- ▶ Request written policies on generative AI use and data handling
- ▶ Ask how artists are compensated – sustainable pay is a signal of catalog quality, not just an ethical question
- ▶ Review the product roadmap for the next 6–12 months

Red flags:

- ▶ Opaque or exploitative AI practices, or a stance misaligned with your brand values
- ▶ White-glove promises that do not hold up under scrutiny
- ▶ Unwillingness to explain artist compensation



Why Epidemic Sound?

Cleared globally. Every track, every market.

Creating content at scale is challenging. Securing the right music, managing licenses, and covering all rights can slow production and create legal exposure. Epidemic Sound solves this with a direct licensing model covering a catalog of over 55,000 tracks and 250,000 studio grade sound effects – including all public performance rights, globally.

No PROs. No retroactive claims.

Every track is created by our signed artists working with our in-house production team, giving you fully cleared music without negotiating with multiple rights holders or dealing with PROs. Our artists are contractually unaffiliated with any Performing Rights Organization at the time of creation, meaning the rights never flow through a PRO in the first place. This structural approach – not merely a contractual carve-out – is the foundation of our legal safety record.

Publish anywhere. Cleared forever.

Our license gives you full flexibility: use music across all platforms, formats, and markets – from online to offline. Content produced during your license term remains cleared in perpetuity, even after your subscription ends. No extra work, no extra fees, no reporting required.

Artists paid upfront. And again in revenue share.

We also ensure artists are compensated fairly: upfront fees, a 50/50 streaming royalty split, and quarterly soundtrack bonuses – keeping the music ecosystem sustainable while your brand stays covered.

All rights included globally. Cleared in perpetuity. Total creative freedom.

Find your brand's
 sound *today*



In Our Customers' *Own Words*

Bonnier News

"The administrative hurdles of licensing used to cost the organization a lot of time. With Epidemic Sound, this cumbersome, time-consuming procedure has been entirely removed."

Elin Bergvik Junger, Producer and Editor

Bucketsquad

"One of the big reasons we chose Epidemic Sound is the clear, reasonable licensing. It lets us publish across YouTube, social, and platforms like Hulu without breaking the bank or worrying about unclear terms."

David Goodliffe, Head of Editorial

Rare Beauty

"I love Epidemic Sound's huge selection of fresh, constantly updated tracks that align with our campaigns. Their solution saves us hours and makes our content stand out."

Logan Reynolds, Content Lead

ATTN:

"We save 150 hours every year by removing cue sheets, and the platform allows us to find great tracks in no time. Epidemic Sound allows us to focus on creativity and storytelling."

Gerry Mattei, Head of Post-Production

Liberty London

"We put so much consideration into our video content, and when we hit publish, we know the licensing is covered forever with Epidemic Sound. With a new social strategy and the help of Epidemic Sound, we doubled our Instagram engagement rate in 2024."

George Serventi, Social Media Manager

Eternal Group (Raive & Joy Gryson brands)

"With Epidemic Sound's wide range of great music and seamless editing tools, we doubled our content output. From online to offline, the music now consistently communicates our brand identity."

Suseok Yang, Creative Lab/Director

Trusted by



LIONSGATE



Lufthansa

The Guardian





Appendix

A: Vendor Scoring Card

Category	Your weight	Score Vendor 1	Score Vendor 2	Score Vendor 3	Score Vendor 4
Catalog quality & scope Recommended weight: 30%					
Legal & compliance Recommended weight: 30%					
Operational efficiency Recommended weight: 15%					
Total cost of ownership (TCO) Recommended weight: 15%					
Strategic partnership & ethics Recommended weight: 10%					
Total score	100%				





B: Glossary of Key Terms

Synchronization (Sync) Rights

The right to use a musical composition in timed relation with visual media (video, film, advertising).

Content ID

YouTube's automated rights management system. Rights holders upload reference files; YouTube scans all uploads and flags matches, allowing the rights holder to monetise, track, or block the content.

Public Performance Rights

The right to perform or broadcast music publicly. Traditionally administered by PROs (e.g. ASCAP, BMI, PRS, GEMA, SACEM).

Performing Rights Organization (PRO)

A collective management organisation that licenses and collects royalties for the public performance of musical works on behalf of its members.

Neighboring Rights Organization (NRO)

An organisation that administers the rights of performers and producers of sound recordings (distinct from composition rights managed by PROs).

Indemnification

A contractual obligation by one party to compensate the other for losses arising from specified claims (e.g. copyright infringement).

Cue Sheet

A document listing every piece of music used in a production, including composer, publisher, duration, and usage type. Required by PROs for royalty distribution.

Chain of Title

The documented sequence of rights transfers from the original creator to the current rights holder. A clean chain of title is essential to demonstrating legal ownership.

Stems

The individual recorded components of a track (e.g. drums, bass, melody, vocals), delivered as separate audio files for flexible use in production.

Mechanical Rights

The right to reproduce a musical composition in a recording (originally for physical media, now covering digital distribution).





C: Total Cost of Ownership Comparison Worksheet

Use this worksheet to compare the true cost of your current approach against an all-inclusive subscription model.

Cost component	Current approach	All-in-one subscription
Annual license/subscription fees		
Per-track or per-project licensing fees		
PRO royalties (ASCAP, BMI, PRS, etc.)		
Cue sheet preparation and filing		
Copyright claim resolution (internal time)		
Legal fees (infringement defence/settlement)		
Content takedown / re-editing costs		
Admin overhead (rights tracking, reporting)		
Total annual cost		



