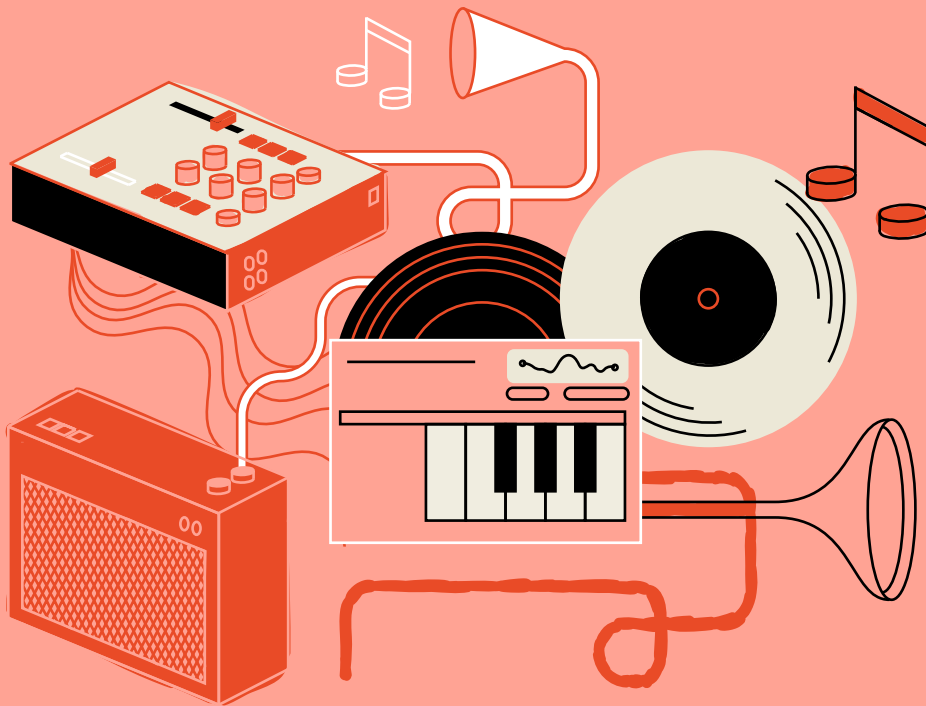


OUT/STANDARD

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MASTERING SYNC:



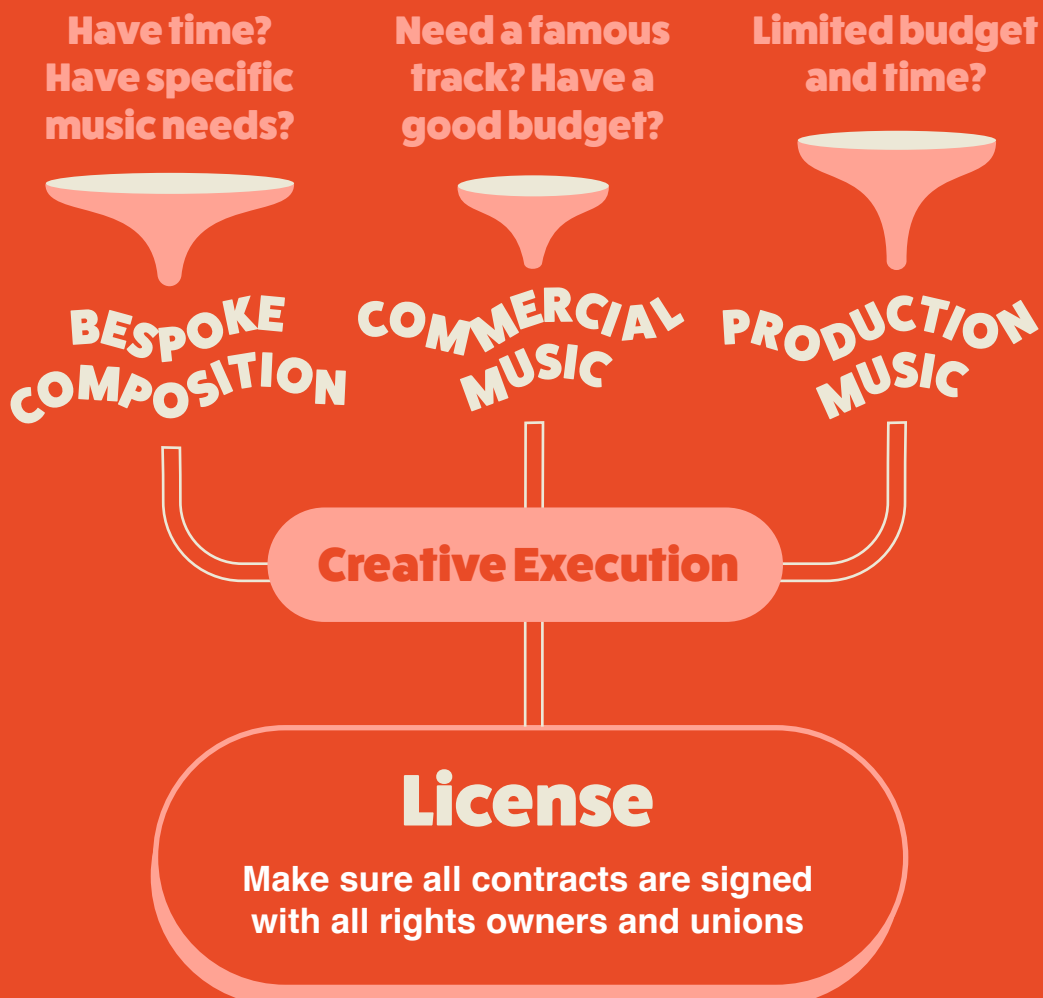
A BRAND'S GUIDE TO MUSIC LICENSING

by Simon Robinson

SUMMARY GUIDE

Write a Music Brief

This will help you outline the best approach





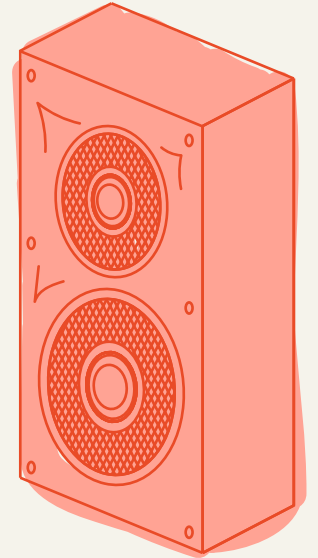
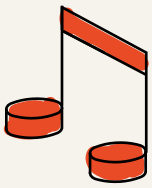
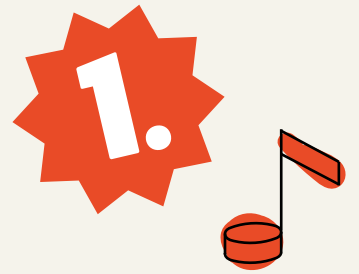
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Make Music Work Harder
for Your Brand



Introduction

THE POWER OF MUSIC



For us, music is one of the most essential elements of the branded content process, helping to create some truly iconic cultural moments over the years. It is a direct pathway to emotions, within seconds, the right track can take listeners on a powerful journey.

Yet, too often, music is treated as an afterthought. A lack of understanding or consideration in the selection process can mean missing out on the best options.

That's where this guide comes in. Designed for those unfamiliar with the world of sync, it will help you navigate its complexities and unlock the full potential of music in branded content. Because the right soundtrack doesn't just complement an ad—it transforms it into an unforgettable and emotionally engaging experience, making it one of the most valuable tools in a marketer's arsenal.

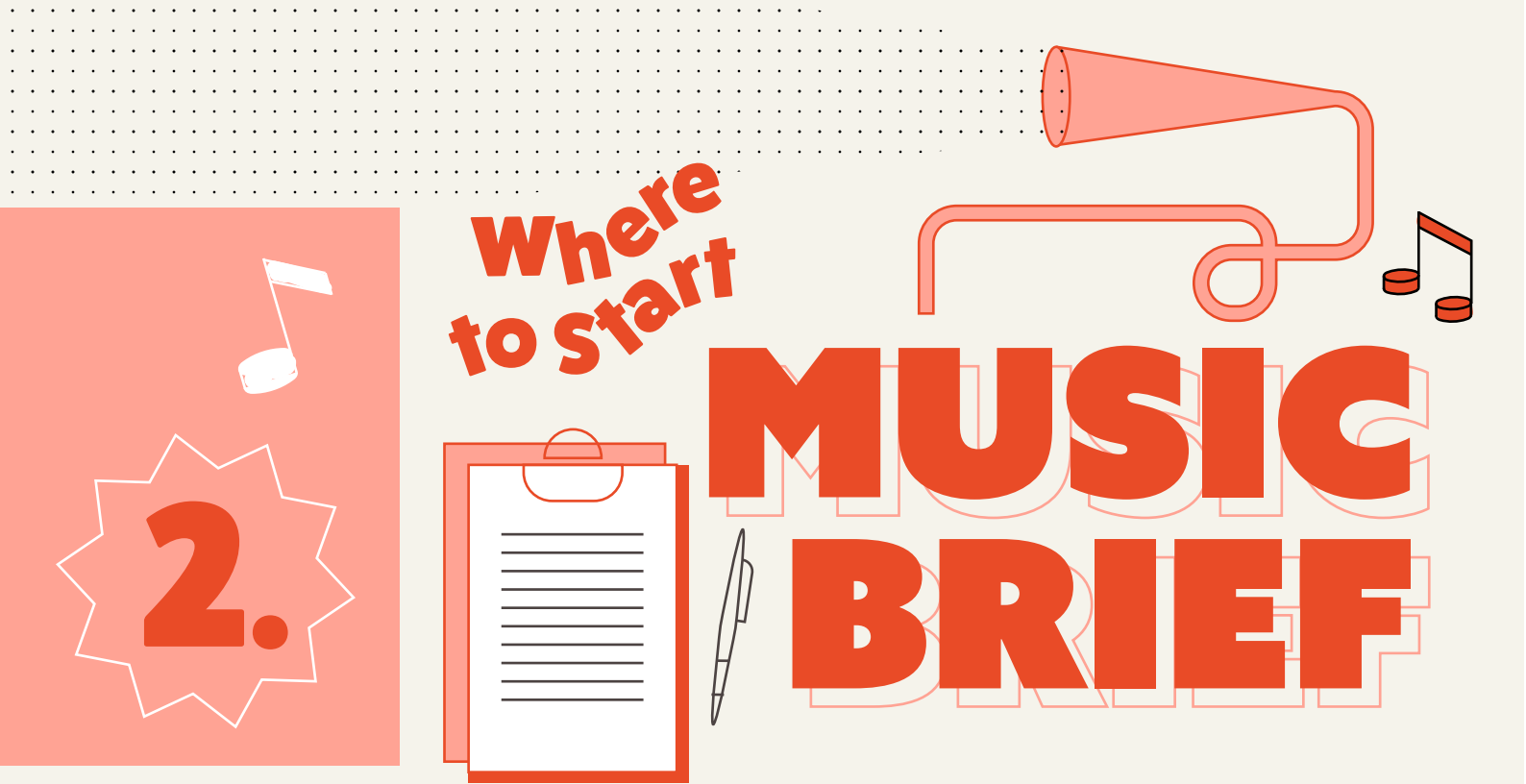
What is Sync for Branded Content?

Sync (short for synchronisation) in branded content refers to the process of pairing music with visual media, such as advertisements and social media campaigns. This involves securing the rights to use a piece of music in conjunction with a brand's content to enhance storytelling and emotional engagement.

The Impact of Music on Advertising Effectiveness

Studies show that the right music choice can significantly improve ad performance. According to a Nielsen study, ads with the right music choice increase ad effectiveness by **27%** by enhancing emotional resonance and message retention. Brands that strategically use music see higher engagement rates and improved brand recall, making sync a crucial element of branded content strategy. So, getting it right makes complete strategic sense.

Over the years, we have seen clients become creatively stuck or get into legal trouble as they have not understood the process properly. But where do you start to ensure that you get off on the right foot?



Before we dive into the different types of music you can use and the rights that you need to license, the first important part of the sync process is to understand what you need from the music in your content:

- *Will the music be in the background only or more prominently used?*
- *Do the lyrics have to tell a story? What is that story?*
- *What is your budget?*
- *Is there a particular emotion you are trying to convey?*
- *How much time do you have to select music?*

Without answering these questions, you can potentially make mistakes further down the line. Writing a robust music brief is one of the most important steps in getting music right.

HERE ARE SOME KEY CONSIDERATIONS TO ANSWER WITH A MUSIC BRIEF

i. Project Overview

Provide a summary of the project, including:

- The brand name
- The campaign or project title
- The type of content (e.g., TV ad, social media video, online campaign)
- The intended platforms (YouTube, Instagram, TV, etc.)



ii. Objectives & Brand Message

Explain the core purpose of the content and what message it should communicate.

Consider:

- *What emotions should the audience feel?*
- *What is the key takeaway of the campaign?*
- *How does this align with the brand's identity and values?*



iii. Target Audience

Define the demographics and psychographics of your target audience:

- Age group, gender, location
- Interests, behaviors, and lifestyle
- Preferred music genres (if known)



vi. Usage & Licensing Requirements

Specify the licensing terms:

- Length of usage (6 months, 1 year, perpetual)
- Geographic coverage (global, regional, national)
- Media formats (online, TV, cinema, radio, social media)



iv. Music Style & Mood

Describe the desired musical characteristics:

- Genre (pop, electronic, orchestral, etc.)
- Mood (uplifting, dramatic, nostalgic, energetic)
- Tempo (fast, slow, mid-tempo)
- Instrumentation preferences (e.g., acoustic, electronic, orchestral)
- Lyrics (related to the visuals, or instrumental only if there is a prominent voiceover)



vii. Budget

Outline the budget for music licensing or composition to help narrow down options between commercial music, production music, or bespoke composition.



v. Reference Tracks

Provide 2-3 reference tracks that capture the vibe you're after. Indicate what you like about them (melody, rhythm, energy, etc.).

It's very important to not rely on one reference only.



viii. Delivery Format & Deadlines

Provide clear details on:

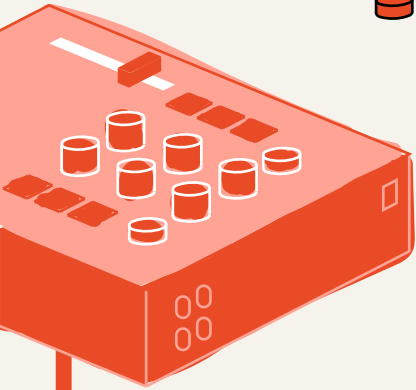
- File format required (WAV, MP3, stems if needed)
- Delivery deadline for final selection
- Revisions timeline, if applicable



By structuring your music brief effectively, you ensure that composers, music supervisors, or licensing teams can deliver the perfect track that enhances your branded content. It always ensures that you have thought about the reason for music importantly and will allow for informed choices.

3.

Music Rights Explained



HOW TO NAVIGATE THE MINEFIELD

Outside of creative decisions, understanding music rights is essential when using music in branded content. Licensing can be complex, with multiple rights holders often involved.

When you are looking to license a piece of music, you need to make sure you clear these rights:

Master Rights

These are the rights to the physical recording and are often controlled by the record label and/or the artist themselves.

Publishing Rights

This is the intellectual property of the song and is owned by songwriters and their publishers. Sometimes, particularly in pop music, the artist is not the writer of the song. It is also common for there to be multiple writers on a song, all controlled by different publishers.

To license a song, all the rights owners need to be contacted and approve the usage.

To get permission to use a song in your content, you need to have received approval not just from the master rights owner, but also the publishing owner. Often in the clearance process, the rights owners have to go to the artist themselves to seek **artist approval**. This is often referred to when seeking quotes. It is only when full artist approval is received for 100% of the master and 100% of the publishing that you have permission to use the song.

How Do You Find the Rights Owners of Music?

Those not necessarily in the know often don't know where to find the rights owners of a song if they want to clear the music rights directly. This is where music supervisors can add value by speeding up this process. Here are a few simple tips if you want to go it alone.

For Master Rights owners, the information is readily available on digital streaming platforms (DSPs) such as Spotify. If you click through to a single or album page of the artist or song in question, at the bottom, there will be a C & P line and the record label name next to it. You can then search online for contact information for that label. It is worth noting that major record labels have lots of subsidiary labels; for example, if the record label says Atlantic Records, this is actually controlled by Warner Records. So it's through them that you have to ultimately license. Again, the internet will point you in the right direction.

Finding the publishing information is slightly trickier. www.prsformusic.com contains a database with all of the writer and publisher information for any song that is registered in the UK, though you have to be a member to have access to it. If you can't register, then when you contact the record label, they will be able to advise on who looks after the publishing.

If the song you are looking to clear is by an artist who is not signed to a label or publisher or has self-released the song, then you should contact them directly, using the contact details on their socials / website / Bandcamp. Often, when we are stuck, a DM to an artist's Instagram account usually kicks off the conversation.

Social Media and Music Rights

Platforms such as Meta (Instagram, Facebook), TikTok, and YouTube have specific licensing agreements, but brands must be cautious when using commercial music. Unauthorised use can lead to content takedowns or legal consequences. Opting for licensed or royalty-free music ensures compliance and avoids copyright claims.

An area where brands commonly make mistakes is with influencers. If a brand pays for an influencer to promote their product or services, the music used in the influencer content is deemed branded content. Therefore, a license must be obtained for its use, or a pre-cleared track should be used. If in doubt, always seek advice.

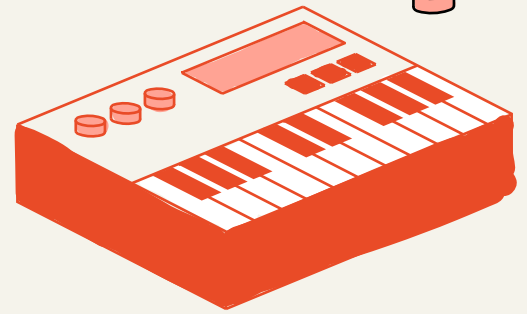
Most platforms require a whitelisting process to ensure your campaign will roll out without interference from copyright protection measures, especially when working with 3rd party content creators with large followings.



THE DIFFERENT TYPES OF MUSIC

4.

When to Use Them



Once you have clarity on the music brief, you will be much better informed on the types of music that will be best suited to your project.

do you have a...



good budget?

a...



short delivery time

do you need...



exclusivity on music

Below are the different types of music and their pros and cons, which will help inform which choice to make:

i. Commercial Music

What? Licensing pre-existing songs that have been commercially released. These can be from famous artists or from up-and-coming artists.

Why? Enhances emotional connection and increases brand recall.

Benefits

- Recognisable and emotionally engaging
- Builds brand credibility
- Can leverage artist's fanbase
- Tracks have already been created

Cons

- Potentially high licensing costs
- Can involve complex clearance process
- Potentially restrictive usage terms
- No ownership for the brand unless paying for a high exclusivity cost
- Can take a long time to obtain artist approvals, especially if it is a famous artist.

ii. Library/Production Music

What? Pre-cleared music designed for commercial use, often sourced from a specific library platform. (e.g. www.out-standard.com)

Why? Cost-effective and easy to license.

Benefits

- Budget-friendly
- Quick and hassle-free licensing
- Wide variety of genres and moods

Cons

- Less unique compared to bespoke music
- May lack the emotional impact of commercial music
- Varying quality

Sometimes, production music can be referred to as royalty-free and copyright-free music, but there is a difference. Royalty-free means users pay a one-time fee to use the music without having to pay ongoing royalties. Copyright-Free is music with expired or non-existent copyright, available for unrestricted use.

iii. Bespoke Composition

What? Custom-made music tailored to a brand's needs created by a composer.

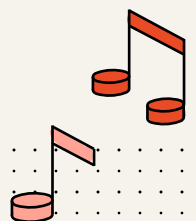
Why? Ensures a unique sound that aligns perfectly with brand messaging.

Benefits

- Exclusive to the brand
- Full creative control
- Avoids licensing complications
- Can make the music work tightly to the picture edit
- Can be a cost-effective solution, depending on the composer you use

Cons

- Can be costly depending on the composer you use and the quality you are after
- Longer production time
- Sometimes it can be hard to achieve music that sounds like the reference tracks that you want use



5.

The Art of the Deal



WHAT INFLUENCES THE PRICE OF MUSIC AND THE BEST WAY TO NEGOTIATE

We've often been asked why music gets charged at certain prices and what drives those decisions. To an outsider without prior knowledge in this world, it can sometimes feel like prices are plucked out of thin air. In the past, we have even had some high-level decision makers ask us why artists are not paying them to be used in their commercials, given the opportunity for wider exposure. Although an extreme example, it does go on to highlight that there is a 2-way relationship happening here and that brands are buying into the creativity and sometimes fame of that artist.

i. Usage type and scope

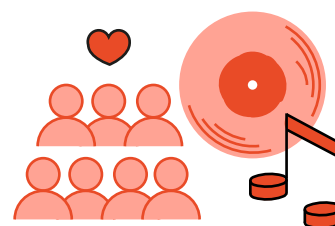
The most significant driving factor - ask yourself:

- *What are your media terms for usage? Is it for TV advertising, which typically charges the highest fees?*
- *Are you purchasing media spend for online advertising or just organic posts?*
- *Which territories are you advertising in?*
- *How long is the term for?*



ii. Popularity of the song + artist

Well-known tracks and artists command a premium, as they can afford to be selective. If your budget is tight, consider whether a famous song is truly necessary or if a lesser-known track can achieve the same impact.



iii. Exclusivity

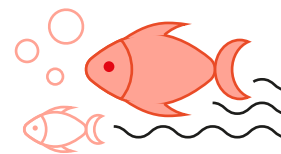
Restricting a track from being used by competitors protects your brand but limits the artist's earning potential, driving up costs. If exclusivity is necessary, consider narrowing it to a specific sector or time frame to keep fees manageable.



iv. Indie labels vs Major Labels

Indie labels, especially smaller ones, tend to charge less than major labels. Major labels benchmark pricing against high-value deals they've previously closed.

- *If multiple rights holders are involved, the one with the largest share often dictates the fee, with others following suit under "most favoured nation" (MFN) terms.*
- *Tracks owned solely by the artist and cleared through one entity (a "one-stop shop") tend to be more affordable.*



So what are the best ways to negotiate the best price? Unfortunately, there is no secret art that will allow you to clear a Rolling Stones track for next to nothing, but following the advice below will mean that you should be getting a fair price.

i. Have a budget in mind and go in with that price. Going in without a defined budget will likely result in a higher initial quote. Be upfront about what you can spend and what that budget covers.

ii. Be very clear about the rights that you want and don't change them mid-negotiation (unless you are taking rights away to lower the price). We recommend using a deal memo sheet, as this demonstrates you have thought about all the eventualities before going into a negotiation.

iii. Do your research before approaching for a quote. Know the artist, the rights owners, and the

song's commercial history. This information helps you assess whether pricing is flexible or firm.

iii. Negotiate any extensions or options up front. If you think you might need an extension, discuss it early. Pre-negotiating options (e.g. additional territories or extended usage) typically results in better pricing than renegotiating later.

iv. Sell in the campaign. Rights holders are more inclined to offer favorable terms when they're excited about a project. Share details about the creative concept, director, and media strategy to help them see the value of the association.

By following these principles, we ensure that our clients receive the best possible deals while maintaining strong relationships within the label and artist community.



Below are some example case studies for each of the three potential music types as a step-by-step guide. We have kept the brand and music info hidden to protect any confidential information.

Commercial Music

A high-end speaker company, via their creative agency, approached us with a music brief specifying that they wanted to look for a track from an up-and-coming artist in the style of contemporary electronic music with a driving energy to it. This was to be used in a commercial launching a new product.

They wanted an up-and-coming artist as this reflected the freshness of the content being shot, and to reflect the newness of the product. There were also budget considerations, as a new artist is typically cheaper to license music from an established one. They had £30,000 to license a track for 1 year of social and digital use, with the paid media territory focus being the UK.

The brief was written, which included reference tracks by Jamie xx and James Blake. The agency then commissioned us to perform a round of music research to present tracks, not just in the right style, but also within budget. We spent 2 days researching and also talking to music rights owners, and we presented our options back to the agency.

After the research, the client selected 3 tracks for their shortlist. We then located the rights owners of the music (master and publishing) to obtain quotes for the song's usage. The quotes were presented to the main client, and their preferred track was selected, which had one record label and one publisher to clear the rights with.

We then confirmed that all the music terms were correct with all parties, and the rights owners sought artist approval, which took 24 hours to obtain in this instance. Once all approvals were received, the record label and the publisher drafted license agreements, which were checked by us and the agency. Once these were confirmed to align with the agency's requirements for the commercial, the contracts were signed and the invoice paid prior to the live date. This completed the process, and the track was fully cleared. The signing of contracts and approvals happened in parallel to the content being worked on in post-production.

Bespoke Composition

We were approached by a well-known food brand via their agency to look at creating a bespoke song for their new brand campaign. They wanted to create a bespoke track as the premise of the campaign was to teach viewers how to pronounce the name of their brand, so the song had to feature the brand name in it. As the name was very specific to the brand, bespoke composition was the only option for music.

Working with the agency on the brief, 3 guide tracks were selected as music references to use as creative inspiration. We then commissioned 3 demos by 3 different composers who created a track based on the brief and a first picture edit. As music supervisors, we worked with the composers to amend their demos slightly to be as strong as possible before sharing them with the agency and client.

The 1st round of the demo process in this instance took around 4 days. Two of the client's favourite routes were chosen from the demos, and we worked with the composers to make amendments based on feedback while also working closely to the picture edit. These demo alterations were presented back to the agency and the client, they then selected their preferred route. We then finalised the music and delivered different versions of the song to go along with the various picture edits.

Once the music was signed off, we completed the music license contracts and invoicing. The whole process took around 3 weeks. The budget was £35,000, which included digital rights for Europe inc Streaming Video On Demand (SVOD) plus online media. Paid media was focussed to Europe but organic online rights were worldwide due to the accessibility of media on the internet.

Production Music

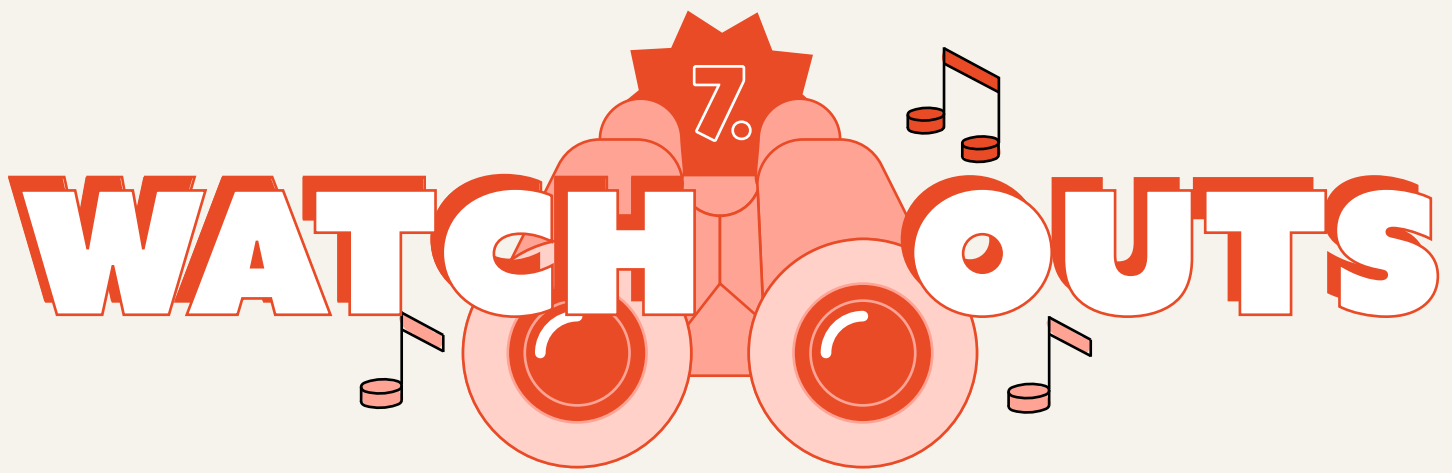
A producer at the agency creating a commercial contacted us to enquire about providing music for a coffee brand campaign. They had to go down the library music route as their budget was limited and had to cover one year of global online usage. This is typically charged at around £1500.

The agency provided a music brief that had two distinct routes. One was a vintage soul route and the other was a more contemporary disco feel. With the music brief, they also shared a picture edit with the reference tracks on. We sent a playlist of suitable tracks from our music library that covered the two distinct briefs. The agency shortlisted 2-3 tracks from each playlist and we edited these to picture to showcase how they work to the edit. They then selected their preferred track and as the music agency we completed the music license via

the MCPS production music licensing platform found here.

The entire process took around 14 days. As we managed to provide suitable tracks, the agency only went to one music library. Often, however, they may contact multiple libraries and receive several playlists to filter through to ensure they get the best track.





WATCH OUTS

Just when you thought you got the hang of it, there are a few nuanced areas that come up from time to time when clearing songs. These don't happen all the time, but they often trip up clients.

Music Unions:

Tracks that were recorded in the USA may be subject to union fee payments when using them for sync. This is because they could feature musicians that are part of the two US unions, American Federation of Musicians (AFM) or SAG-AFTRA. The record label can advise if they believe fees are due, or you can contact the unions directly. Fees are typically due on older tracks with multiple session musicians outside of the band and were recorded in the US, and the fee is only applicable to the master recording, not the publishing.

Some UK recordings are also subject to union fees via the Musicians' Union (MU). Similar to AFM and SAG-AFTRA, you can find out if fees are applicable by contacting the MU directly.

Estates of Deceased Artists:

When clearing music by a deceased artist, you must secure approval from their estate, which often controls the rights to their recordings and compositions. This process can be complex as it may involve multiple rights holders, including heirs, publishers, record labels, and legal representatives. Estates may have strict guidelines on how the artist's work is used, making negotiations more nuanced and sometimes lengthier than standard sync licensing. For example, when clearing an Elvis Presley song, payments are due to an additional party on top of the master and publishing fee.

Out of Copyright:

This means that a piece of music is no longer protected by copyright law, typically because its term has expired (e.g., 70 years after the creator's death in many countries). This allows the composition to be freely used without needing permission or paying licensing fees. However, if a specific recording is still under copyright (e.g. a modern orchestration of a classical piece), you may still need to clear the master rights. Furthermore, the length of term for out-of-copyright varies in many countries, as some do not

count the World War years as part of the term. So, if you are licensing in multiple territories, you must ensure you abide by the rules for all the countries. Many older classical compositions are generally safe, but tread with caution around mid-century deceased writers. It is much safer to check than to assume that it is safe to use.

Samples:

Often, especially in Hip-Hop songs, an artist may have used another piece of music within their song. This will need clearing in the same way as the main song. The label may have already pre-cleared the recording of the sample, but it is always best to ask. Often, there will be multiple publishers to go through as the songwriters for the sampled song will also be credited.

Cover Versions/Re-Records:

Creating new versions of an existing track has become an increasingly popular trend in recent years. This is done either by changing the style of the original or perhaps adapting the lyrics to create a parody version. As a new recording is being created, this will typically need to be cleared with the composer. The publishing still needs to be cleared via the normal channels. They will also review the new version, as they may not give artist approval if they do not like it. So it is always important to check if there are creative parameters around creating a new version of a song.

Changing the Terms Mid Negotiation:

Time and time again, this is where we see deals become complicated, and there is not much nuance to these situations. Adding in terms halfway through negotiations will always delay the process further, as you have to go back to seek the artist's permission again. This will typically add on extra cost than if it were in the term sheet at the start of the process. If you follow the brief process from above, then hopefully, you will avoid this scenario.





WORKING WITH A MUSIC SUPERVISOR

So why work with a music supervisor? Do we add value to the process or incur extra cost? Working with a music supervisor ensures that your project has the right soundtrack while navigating the complexities of music rights and licensing. It is about creative collaboration and making sure you get the best out of music.

1. Expert Music Selection

They can choose tracks that align with a brand's identity, mood, and message to maximise emotional impact.

3. Budget Optimization

Supervisors negotiate deals and find cost-effective alternatives, whether through sync licensing, production music, or custom compositions.

5. Efficiency & Brand Impact

They streamline the process, allowing creative teams and producers to focus on storytelling and getting the production made while ensuring the music is working as hard for the brand as possible.

2. Legal & Licensing Guidance

They handle music rights, secure permissions, and prevent copyright issues, ensuring compliance. They have a full understanding of the music licensing process.

4. Access to Exclusive Music & Talent

Their music industry connections provide brands with unique or unreleased tracks, emerging artists, and bespoke compositions.

*Hiring a music supervisor ensures **quality, efficiency, music expertise and strategic impact** for any ad campaign.*

9.



Outro

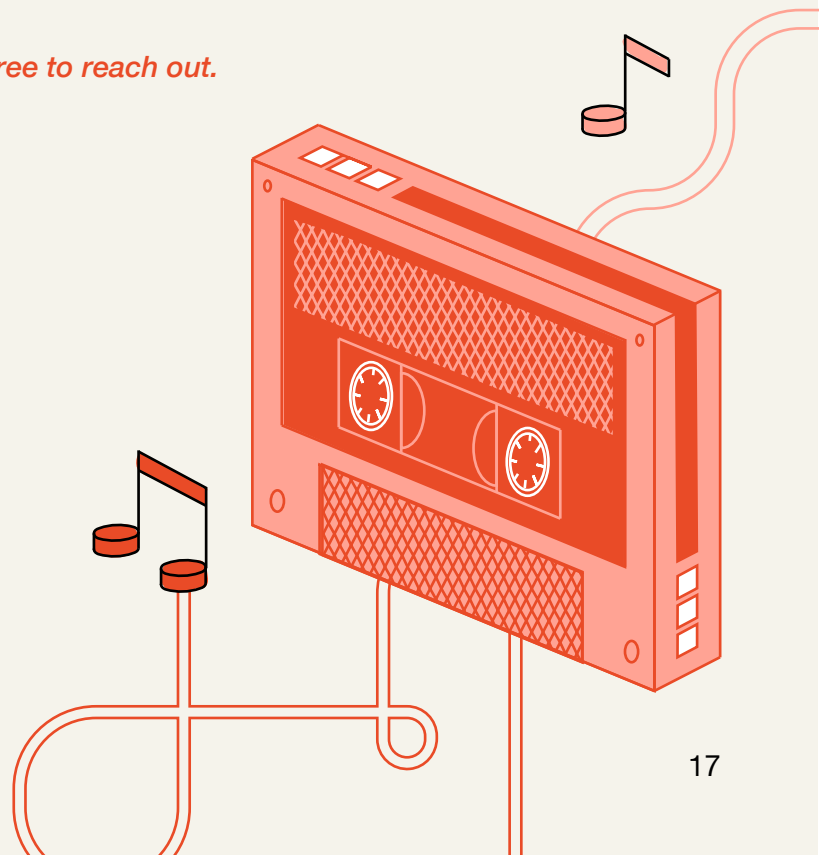
MAKE MUSIC WORK HARDER FOR YOUR BRAND

As you've seen throughout this guide, we're deeply passionate about helping our clients harness the full power of music—no matter the constraints of their project. With the right approach, music can elevate your branded content, adding emotional depth, boosting engagement, and reinforcing your brand identity.

While the world of music licensing can seem complex, it doesn't have to feel overwhelming. Our goal with this guide has been to equip you with the insights, confidence, and practical tools you need to tap into music's full creative and strategic potential.

Now it's over to you. Think strategically, brief with creativity, and license with intention. And most importantly—enjoy the process. Music should be an inspiring and playful part of your brand journey, and when used well, it becomes one of the most powerful tools in your storytelling arsenal.

*If you are stuck or need advice then please feel free to reach out.
Our details are at the end of this booklet.*



Musical Glossary

Bespoke Composition – Music that is specially composed for an advertisement to match a brand’s unique needs.

Buyout – A licensing agreement where a one-time payment is made for the perpetual use of a piece of music.

Cue Sheet – A document that details the music used in an audiovisual production, including song titles, composers, publishers, and usage length, typically submitted to performance rights organisations (PROs).

Cut-Down – A shorter edit of a commercial, which may require modifications to the licensed music to fit the new duration.

Exclusive License – A sync deal where the music is licensed exclusively to a specific brand or campaign for a set period.

Instrumental Version – A version of a song without vocals, often used in commercials to allow voiceovers to stand out.

Library Music (Production Music) – Pre-recorded music available for licensing, often through a music library or catalog, commonly used in commercials.

Master License – A license granting the right to use a specific recording of a song in a commercial or other media.

Mechanical Royalties – Payments made to songwriters and publishers for the reproduction of their music, typically in physical or digital formats, but also relevant in certain sync deals.

Media Buy – The type of media channels where the ad will be placed (TV, radio, social media, streaming, etc.), which affects the licensing cost.

MFN (Most Favored Nations) – A clause in contracts ensuring that all rights holders (master and publishing) receive equal payment terms.

Non-Exclusive License – A sync deal where the same piece of music can be licensed to multiple advertisers or projects simultaneously.

One-Stop – A term used when a music rights holder owns or controls both the master and publishing rights, making licensing more straightforward.

Performance Rights Organisation (PRO) –

An organisation that collects and distributes performance royalties to songwriters and publishers (e.g., ASCAP, BMI, SESAC, PRS, SOCAN).

Pre-Cleared Music – Music that has already been approved for licensing, making it easier and faster to use in sync projects.

Public Performance Royalties – Royalties earned when music is played publicly, including on TV or online platforms, collected by PROs.

Publishing License – A license that grants the right to use the composition (melody, lyrics, and arrangement) of a song. It is separate from the master license.

Re-Record – A newly recorded version of a song, often created to avoid licensing the original master recording while still capturing the essence of the original composition.

Sonic Branding – The strategic use of music, jingles, or sound effects to create a recognizable brand identity.

Stem – Individual audio tracks (e.g., vocals, drums, bass) that can be used for remixing or adapting a song for a commercial.

Synchronisation (Sync) License – A legal agreement that allows music to be used in audiovisual content, such as commercials, films, or TV shows.

Tag (End Tag) – The final few seconds of an advertisement where a brand name, slogan, or logo is featured, sometimes requiring a specific music edit.

Term – The length of time the sync license is valid for a specific use.

Territory – The geographical region where the advertisement featuring the music can be broadcast or distributed.

Usage Rights – The specific ways in which a song can be used in an advertisement, including territory, duration, and media platforms.

White Listing – Granting permission for a specific brand or platform to use a song in digital advertising without triggering copyright restrictions, such as takedowns or monetisation claims on platforms like YouTube or Instagram.

Work-for-Hire – A music arrangement where the composer or producer creates custom music for a project and the rights are fully transferred to the client.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Simon Robinson is co-founder of Pitch & Sync and Out/Standard. For the past 18 years Pitch & Sync has been at the forefront of finding music solutions for global brand campaigns. They are a 360 music consultancy that provides end to end audio solutions from sound design, audio mix, search, licensing and composition through to talent partnerships and audio branding. 6 years ago he co-founded Out/Standard a music library platform offering commercially sounding music at flexible pricing for the brand and content creator worlds. He has pretty much seen and cleared it all in the world of sync.

For further advice and assistance
contact info@out-standard.com
for production music requests

or info@pitchandsync.com
for commercial music enquiries
and bespoke composition



www.pitchandsync.com | www.out-standard.com

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