

# Distributor Selection Playbook

**Purpose:** Help independent rappers choose a music distributor that fits *their situation*, not just what's popular. This is a decision framework — not a checklist to rush through.

Use this **before creating an account or uploading anything**.

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## Phase 1: Define Your Reality (Before Looking at Platforms)

Clarify these first. The wrong distributor usually comes from skipping this step.

- Release frequency planned (once-off, occasional, or consistent)
- Long-term intent (testing music vs building a catalog)
- Budget tolerance (one-time fee vs recurring payments)
- Comfort with admin (hands-off vs self-managed)
- Importance of permanence (music must stay live no matter what)

If you can't answer these clearly, pause. Platform comparisons won't help yet.

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## Phase 2: Ownership & Control Questions (Non-Negotiables)

Ask these *before* pricing or features.

- Who owns the masters under this distributor?
- What happens to your music if payments stop?
- Can releases be transferred out easily?
- Are takedowns reversible or permanent?
- Does the distributor ever claim rights on your behalf?

**If any answer is unclear → treat it as a risk.**

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## Phase 3: YouTube Content ID Reality Check

This is where many rappers lose money quietly.

- Is YouTube Content ID optional or automatic?
- Who controls claims — you or the distributor?
- What percentage does the distributor take from YouTube revenue?
- How easy is it to remove or adjust claims?
- What happens if your beat already exists on YouTube?

**Downside to watch:** Some platforms lock Content ID behind higher tiers or keep a cut even if you leave.

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## Phase 4: Cost Structure (Short vs Long Term)

Don't just ask "how much?" — ask **over how long**.

- Upfront fees vs annual subscriptions
- Cost per release vs unlimited uploads
- Hidden fees (stores, Content ID, split tools, takedowns)
- Cost to keep music live for 3–5 years
- Cost to leave

**Cheap upfront often becomes expensive later.**

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## Phase 5: Catalog Protection & Scaling

Choose based on where you're going, not where you are.

- Can the distributor handle a growing catalog?
- Do they support split payments cleanly?
- Are reports clear enough to audit yourself?
- Can the platform support multiple artist names if needed?

**Downside:** Some distributors work fine for singles but break down once volume increases.

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## Phase 6: Risk Assessment (The Trade-Offs)

Every distributor has a weakness. Identify which one you can live with.

- Convenience vs control
- Speed vs permanence
- Low cost vs long-term security
- Automation vs manual oversight

There is no perfect platform — only aligned trade-offs.

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## Final Decision Rule

**Choose the distributor whose downsides hurt you the least — not the one with the most features.**

Once chosen: - Document why you chose it - Revisit the decision annually - Avoid switching unless the risk clearly outweighs the cost

To see how this playbook applies in real terms, read: [The 5 Best Music Distributors for 2026 \(And the One I Chose\)](#)