

HLPFL

Music Business Startup Checklist

Your Complete Guide to Launching a Professional Music Business

Welcome to Your Music Business Journey

Starting a music business can feel overwhelming, but with the right roadmap, you can build a solid foundation for long-term success. This checklist covers everything from legal structure to marketing strategy, ensuring you don't miss any critical steps. Use this as your guide to transform your musical passion into a thriving business.

Phase 1: Legal Foundation (Weeks 1-2)

☐ Choose Your Business Structure

Decide between LLC, S-Corp, or Sole Proprietorship. For most music businesses, an LLC offers the best protection and tax flexibility.

☐ Register Your Business Entity

File formation documents with your state. Include music-specific provisions in your operating agreement.

☐ Obtain EIN from IRS

Get your Employer Identification Number for tax purposes and business banking. This is free and takes 10 minutes online.

☐ Open Business Bank Account

Separate personal and business finances immediately. This protects your liability shield and simplifies accounting.

☐ Register for State/Local Licenses

Check your state and city requirements for business licenses and permits specific to music businesses.

Pro Tip: Entity Formation

Don't skip the operating agreement! Even if you're a solo founder, this document protects you legally and makes future fundraising or partnerships much easier. Include clauses about intellectual property ownership and revenue splits.

Phase 2: Financial Setup (Weeks 2-3)

☐ **Set Up Accounting System**

Choose QuickBooks, FreshBooks, or Wave. Track income and expenses from day one for tax purposes.

☐ **Get Business Credit Card**

Build business credit and earn rewards on expenses. Keep personal and business spending completely separate.

☐ **Set Up Payment Processing**

Create accounts with Stripe, PayPal, and Venmo for Business to accept payments from clients and customers.

☐ **Create Financial Projections**

Project revenue and expenses for the first year. Be conservative with income estimates and generous with expense estimates.

☐ **Establish Emergency Fund**

Set aside 3-6 months of operating expenses. This cushion helps you weather slow periods and unexpected costs.

Phase 3: Intellectual Property & Contracts (Weeks 3-4)

☐ **Register Copyrights**

File copyright registrations for your original music, lyrics, and recordings with the U.S. Copyright Office.

☐ **Trademark Your Brand**

Protect your business name, logo, and any unique phrases or symbols associated with your brand.

☐ **Create Contract Templates**

Develop standard agreements for collaborations, performances, production work, and licensing deals.

☐ **Join PRO (ASCAP/BMI/SESAC)**

Register with a Performance Rights Organization to collect royalties when your music is performed publicly.

☐ **Register with SoundExchange**

Collect digital performance royalties from streaming services and internet radio.

Pro Tip: Royalty Collection

Don't leave money on the table! Many artists miss out on thousands in royalties because they haven't registered with all the necessary organizations. Set up accounts with your PRO, SoundExchange, and consider a publishing administrator like Songtrust or CD Baby Pro.

Phase 4: Brand & Online Presence (Weeks 4-6)

☐ **Develop Brand Identity**

Create logo, color palette, fonts, and visual style guide. Consistency builds recognition and professionalism.

☐ **Build Professional Website**

Create a central hub for your music, bio, press kit, and contact information. Own your domain and hosting.

☐ **Set Up Social Media Profiles**

Claim your name on Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, Twitter, and Facebook. Use consistent branding across all platforms.

☐ **Create Email Marketing System**

Set up Mailchimp, ConvertKit, or similar. Build your email list from day one—it's your most valuable asset.

☐ **Develop Content Strategy**

Plan regular content for social media, blog, and email. Consistency is key to building an engaged audience.

Phase 5: Distribution & Marketing (Weeks 6-8)

☐ Choose Distribution Partner

Select DistroKid, CD Baby, TuneCore, or similar to get your music on all streaming platforms.

☐ Set Up Spotify for Artists

Claim your artist profile, customize your bio, and access analytics to understand your audience.

☐ Create Press Kit

Develop professional EPK with bio, photos, music samples, press quotes, and contact information.

☐ Build Media Contact List

Research and compile contacts for blogs, playlists, radio stations, and music journalists in your genre.

☐ Plan Release Strategy

Create timeline for singles, EPs, or albums. Plan promotional activities 6-8 weeks before each release.

Phase 6: Revenue Streams (Ongoing)

☐ Set Up Merchandise Store

Create online store with Shopify, Big Cartel, or print-on-demand services like Printful.

☐ Establish Booking System

Set up process for booking shows, including contracts, riders, and payment terms.

☐ Create Sync Licensing Portfolio

Prepare instrumental versions and register with sync licensing platforms like Musicbed or Artlist.

☐ Develop Teaching/Coaching Offerings

Package your expertise into lessons, courses, or consulting services for additional income.

☐ Explore Crowdfunding Options

Consider Patreon, Kickstarter, or similar platforms to fund projects and build community support.

Pro Tip: Multiple Revenue Streams

The most successful music businesses don't rely on a single income source. Aim for at least 3-5 revenue streams: streaming, live performances, merchandise, sync licensing, and teaching/consulting. This diversification protects you when one stream slows down.

Phase 7: Team Building (Months 3-6)

☐ Find Music Attorney

Establish relationship with entertainment lawyer for contract review and legal guidance.

☐ Hire Accountant/Bookkeeper

Get professional help with taxes, quarterly filings, and financial planning specific to music businesses.

☐ Build Creative Team

Develop relationships with producers, engineers, photographers, videographers, and designers.

☐ Consider Management/Agent

When ready, explore representation for booking, management, or publicity to scale your business.

☐ Join Industry Organizations

Network through Recording Academy, AIMP, or local music business groups for connections and resources.

Need Help Getting Started?

HLPFL specializes in helping music entrepreneurs build solid business foundations.

Book a free consultation: calendly.com/founder-hlpfl/30min

Visit us: hlpfl.org