Commercial Streaming Services: Comparisons and Recommendations for Small Businesses

In the past decade, music streaming has rapidly replaced CDs and MP3 players. While consumers are enjoying nearly unlimited libraries full of streamable music, commercial businesses (large and small) have also started to reap the benefits of the shift towards music streaming. This has created a demand for commercial friendly streaming services and an influx of software that aims to address this problem.

Especially for a new business owner, choosing a streaming services in a booming market is overwhelming. This report presents the benefits and drawbacks of four of the most popular streaming services available.

Introduction to commercial streaming services

In the late 1880s and through the early 1900s, department stores often hired choirs, orchestras, and other musicians to perform as shoppers browsed shelves. This was an innovative marketing campaign that drew shoppers into the store and created an air of luxury and abundance. Today music is still used in stores to make shopping a more comfortable and enjoyable experience for both customers and workers alike.

Why Stream Music? When you are first starting a business, it may seem more economical to use a CD or not play music at all. These options may indeed be the best fit for your business, but streaming offers features that may be worth investing in. The following are a few of the benefits to streaming:

- Creating a more comfortable environment for customers and employees.
- A larger variety in songs and artists than a CD collection.
- The ability to change your music selection frequently.
- Pre-made playlists, algorithm based streaming for a variety of moods and genres. (These options will depend on the streaming service.)

How does commercial streaming work? The streaming platforms intended for individual consumers do not provide the licenses necessary to play music in a commercial setting. In order to play music in a retail store of more than 2000 square feet, the business needs to purchase from one of many performers rights organizations (SESAC, ASCAP, BMI). Different artists are represented by different organizations and the business owner can only play music that they have the license for. This means that the business will have to find its own platform for playing music and ensure that they are only playing songs covered by the license they own. If an unlicensed song is played in error, the business can be held responsible for copyright infringement. The commercial streaming services recommended by this report will purchase multiple licenses and provide a platform that will only play licensed music. These services allow businesses to play popular music. Other commercial music services may offer royalty free music or create their own music using algorithms or contracted musicians and sound engineers.

Requirements for Commercial Streaming Services

This report will only analyze streaming services that meet the following criteria:
- Offers licensed music rather than royalty free music.
- Has a library of at least a million songs.
- Includes a music player that works on Mac or PC.
- Offers either curated playlists or a "radio" powered by an algorithm.
- Provides a user-friendly platform that can be used without training.
- Offers at least one package that meets this criteria and costs less than $40 per location per month including any additional fees.
- Pricing must be published on the company website.

Points of Comparison

This report will compare the following commercial streaming services: Soundtrack your Brand, Pandora for Business, RockBot, and Jukeboxy.

All of the streaming services offer a free trial period ranging from 7-30 days.

Playback Functions. Playlists are either created by curators or developed by an algorithm. Algorithm generated playlists update constantly and can sometimes be adapted to user preferences. Playlists that are curated by people can sometimes have a better understanding of the desired mood or genre. They also are easier to preview and potentially edit. The following features are available for the lowest priced plan available on each service:

- Soundtrack your Brand offers over 500 staff curated playlists and algorithm generated playlists based on suggested artists or mood.
- Pandora for Business only offers "stations" of algorithm generated playlists. These playlists cannot be created or previewed. They are customized by giving individual songs a "thumbs up" or "thumbs down" via the mobile app remote. Users can only skip six songs per hour per station.
- RockBot offers "hundreds of playlists." These playlists are updated automatically based on an algorithm. Users can also create their own playlists from RockBot's library or import playlists from Spotify or iTunes.
- Jukeboxy has algorithm generated playlists based on mood. Users can also create playlists and transfer them from iTunes and Spotify.

All of these platforms offer an optional explicit filter to avoid sensitive language and content. They also all have the ability to schedule music to change automatically. (See "Additional Upgrades" for additional features).

Player Platform Options. All of the streaming services in this report run a downloadable platform for PC or MAC. They also all have mobile apps that function as a "remote."

Some businesses prefer player devices so that employees are not able to modify the music selection. Player devices also tend to use less internet bandwidth and will work offline. All of these services offer a player device for an additional cost. Pandora requires users to purchase and use a player device. The other streaming services' player devices are optional.

Price. All of the services bill on a monthly basis. Some also offer annual billing at a discount.

- Soundtrack your Brand's "essential" plan (the most affordable option), is $35 per location per month or $378 billed annually.
- Pandora for business is $26.95 per month. It also requires a one-time purchase of their ProFusion Player for $99.
- RockBot is $24.95 per month or $359.40 annually.
- Jukeboxy is $24.95 per month. They also offer custom discounts for multiple locations.

These prices are for the least expensive plan available.

Additional Upgrades. Soundtrack your Brand and RockBot offer additional plans that provide additional features. RockBot also offers services beyond music streaming. Jukeboxy also offers a custom playlist curation service.

- Soundtrack your brand offers an upgraded plan at $49 per month or $529.20 per year. This plan allows businesses to create their own playlists, edit existing playlists, and transfer playlists from Spotify.
- RockBot offers an upgrade for $49 per month that includes guest song requests and social media and TV integration. It also offers an audio promotion platform for $10/month and a digital signage platform for $25/month. It also offers RockBot TV which is priced on a case-by-case basis.
- Jukeboxy offers custom playlists curated by experts for an individual brand or business. The website does not list pricing for this service.

Soundtrack your Brand and RockBot also offer custom priced plans that include working with a designated account manager to meet needs that extend beyond the offered packages.

Summary

All of the music services in this report provide a large music library that will ultimately meet the goal of creating a pleasant, personal experience for customers and employees. The reasons a business owner might choose a streaming service over licensing their own music are primarily saving money by not purchasing multiple music licenses and saving time by automating playback and having access to playlists and algorithm generated streams. There is potential however, to sacrifice customizability based on the limited list of playlist functions for each platform. Therefore, when we assess the above services, we are looking for the platform that provides the most options for automated or staff-curated playlists without losing the ability to create or customize music if needed. We can also consider potential upgrades, additional services, and unique features that enhance customer experience.

The following are some of the key takeaways considered in this recommendation:

- All of these services offer at least a million songs in their libraries.
- All of the services are compatible with PC and MAC. They also all have app compatibility and offer a playback device for an additional fee.
- All of the services provide basic features required for functioning safely in a retail space. This includes explicit filters and limited accessibility options for unauthorized users.
- Soundtrack your Brand is the most expensive option on the list and it only allows you to create custom playlists once you upgrade to a premium plan. However it is the only platform that allows the user to edit existing playlists.

- Pandora for Business requires purchase and use of their player device, which may not be ideal for all businesses. It also has the most limited playback options by only providing "stations" that play music based on an algorithm. The only opportunity for customization is to "thumbs up" or "thumbs down" individual songs, which is difficult to do while owners and employees are running their business.
- RockBot offers custom playlists, algorithm generated streams, and staff-curated playlists. It also offers the most robust upgrade options including, guest request features, audio promotion, digital signage, and TV.
- JukeBoxy also offers custom playlists, algorithm generated streams, and staff-curated playlists. It also has an audio promotion feature.

Figure 1. Playback Features

Platform	Algorithm Generated Stream	Pre-made Playlists	Custom Playlists	Transfer Playlists	Unlimited Skips	Edit Existing Playlists
Soundtrack your Brand	✅	✅			✅	✅
Pandora for Business	✅					
RockBot	✅	✅	✅	✅	✅	
JukeBoxy	✅	✅	✅	✅	✅	

Recommendation

Based on price, number of features and upgrade options, RockBot is recommended as the most comprehensive commercial music streaming service on this report. For $24.95 a month and considering their discount for an annual subscription, RockBot is the most affordable option on this list. Its entry level plan offers a robust set of playback options that give business owners the option of automating the music selection or customizing playlists. What sets RockBot apart however, are the robust upgrade options.

Jukeboxy also offers the same playback features for $24.95/month. It also includes the option for custom audio promotions without an upgrade. Jukeboxy's audio promotion platform only has basic voice recording and editing functions. For an extra fee, RockBot offers a more robust platform with text-to-speech software. For new businesses that have limited access to recording and editing equipment, it may be worth the extra cost. RockBot's long list of upgrade options are what set it apart from Jukeboxy. Although a new business may want to start with the basic entry level plan, RockBot is ready to accommodate your growth and new media ideas without having to add another platform.

Sources

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