

Planning your release: The Timeline

If you are intending to release an album or single then it is wise to get your manufacturing done well in advance of the official release date. There are also quite a few important things that need to be done before a recording is ready for manufacturing.

The Manufacturing Licence

If your release contains copyrighted material, or cover versions, the primary thing to obtain is a manufacturing licence from the Mechanical Right's Protection Society, otherwise known as the MCPS (see our links page). If it's all your own work, this is not an issue. It's wise to contact the MCPS early on, because in a worst-case scenario, obtaining a licence can take weeks, particularly if permission of the songwriters or publishing company is needed. If there are no other songwriters or publishing companies involved, the MCPS will issue both you and the manufacturer a 'Statement Of No Claim', meaning that you have been granted permission to go ahead with production. Uniquely, Media Sourcing can proceed with manufacture when you sign the License Declaration form (in the HELP section of the website). This means that as long as you own the material to be pressed, you can avoid the process above. It isn't a bad idea to register your title anyway, as this protects you too. Where there is an MCPS claim, the relevant fee (8.5 percent of the Published Price to Dealer (PPD) or 6.5 percent of sale price) has to be paid in order to gain the licence. This also means that if a distributor or dealer is being used to get stock into shops, you will have first have to agree a pricing structure with them before filling in the application to the MCPS. When filling in the relevant licence application, the MCPS ask for the name and address of the manufacturing company (Media Sourcing, for example), so that they can send notification to the manufacturer when a licence has been granted. This forces you to decide on your manufacturer well in advance. Clearly it is best to ensure all of this is sorted out way before your plan on getting anything manufactured.

Mastering

If you are intending to get the recording mastered then it is a good idea to leave about a month for this part of the process. If you're lucky the whole thing might only take a day or two, but its better to err on the side of caution, especially if you haven't produced a CD before. It's not unheard of for artists and producers to revisit some of their mixes having had time to reflect on the sound of the finished master tape.

It's also important to allow time in case there is a problem booking the mastering session, or if there is a format problem with the media. CD-Rs can easily become corrupted, lost in the post or scratched, so it is wise to send the mastering engineer the tracks in advance of the session so that you both know all is ready to go ahead on the day.

Having heard the final master copy you might also want the engineer to tweak a track or two or change their order and spacing. The only way to come to a proper conclusion is to take home a copy of the master file and spend time listening to it on a few stereo systems. It's also necessary to build in a few days for the posting of the Exabyte or CD-R to the manufacturer.

Codes

While sorting out the mastering, you might also want to arrange to have some International Standard Recording Codes (ISRCs) allocated to your tracks. These are easily added by the mastering engineer, but can only be allocated by the Phonographic Performance Limited (PPL) in the UK. See the links section on our website. Fortunately the PPL can issue ISRCs over the phone, so this can be done relatively quickly. If you are planning to distribute your tracks through the shops then bar codes will also be required by the record stores, supermarkets, and most likely by the distributor as well. In this case, the e-centre have to be contacted in advance to obtain a licence. Obviously you'll need to have the codes sorted before the artwork is completed. Contact Media Sourcing for further assistance at any time.

Artwork

At the same time as all this is going on you will need to be working hard to get the artwork finished, as this has to arrive with the manufacturer at the same time as the master. If you don't want to do the graphic layout yourself, Media Sourcing's in-house designers will be happy to help, although they will need to receive the component parts and instructions well in advance of the production date. Otherwise, you'll need to hire a freelance artist and designer and negotiate a completion date for the work. Please take a look at our 'Producing Artwork For Printing' PDF for some practical advice on producing artwork. When the MCPS send out licence application forms they usually included some information explaining what official notices need to go on CD and artwork. These include Copyright notification statements, Compact disc logos, catalogue numbers and so on. Clearly you'll need to provide all the necessities at the start of the artwork design process.

Delivery

Once everything is in the hands of Media Sourcing, a date can be set for when the batch of CD or CD-ROMs will be delivered to you. Please see 'About the Process' and 'Terms and Conditions' for more information. They're as fair, straightforward and userfriendly as possible.

Promotional Copies

Even after CD Sourcing have supplied the manufactured CDs, there is a lot to do before the product can be officially released. Firstly, if you're hoping to interest the media, promotional copies have to be sent out to all parties. The MCPS require stickers bearing the words 'Promotional Copy Only – Not For Resale' to be added to all the free copies, and this is something that has to be agreed when filling in the licence application, if you are actually paying any royalties to a third party. Media Sourcing can arrange for the appropriate stickers to be added at the manufacturing stage, however, most small labels owning a laser printer make their own and add them by hand as they prepare the press release packs. Please note, none of this is necessary if it is all your own material. Preparing and posting promotional copies can take a while if there is no PR agent doing the work, so, once again, some time should be set into the budget.

Magazine deadlines

The next thing to account for is the production schedule of magazines and the press. Let's say you want to get your album reviewed in the July issue of a monthly magazine, for example: the chances are that the July issue will actually reach the newsstands in June. To make the June date, the finished magazine will have to arrive at the printers at least a week beforehand in mid May, so they have time to setup, check proofs, print, pack and distribute. The editorial team would have been writing and editing their text from mid April to mid May to make the deadline, so the album would need to reach the office at the start of April to stand a good chance of making the July issue review pages. Some magazines pre-produce regular features ahead of schedule so they the workflow is spread over the production schedule, so it would actually be prudent to have a finished release in the post in March to be sure of a July editorial! Naturally newspapers that are prepared weekly have a shorter production time, but you still have to account for the monthly magazines.

Distributor deadlines

If you are using a distributor to get records into shops then you also need to pay close attention to their schedule. The bigger companies often produce an annual date list explaining what information or product they need to have to meet any given release date. If, as in the example above, the album's release date is July 1st, the distributor might need the relevant sales notes and promotional copies by the start of May. If the distributor is handling international export, they are likely to want the actual sales stock earlier too.

In Conclusion

Larger record companies have the experience and man/woman-power to turn things around quickly if necessary, but small independent labels or bands releasing their own material need to give themselves as much time as possible. Doing so will ensure they have the best chance of success in their endeavors.