



Paying For Media

Is paying for playlisting, magazine articles and other media space worth it?

In our day to day communications with artists a very common question we get asked is; *“is it worth paying money to get our music shared on this blog or this playlist?”*

There is no right or wrong answer to that question, and often in our conversations with artists, we do seek more context around multiple factors prior to giving them an informed response. The purpose of this article is to inform artists on what to think about when faced with the situation of whether to pay for media support or not.

Media, in its simplest form, means multiple forms of communication that reach or influence people widely. Types of media pertaining to music specifically are things like Spotify / Apple Music playlists, online / print magazines, radio play or additions, social media shout outs etc.

Within the Australian / New Zealand territory, ‘*pay for play*’ is a prevalent form of currency to land media for releases and brand development. This is partly due to the saturation of artists filling up social media feeds and creating separation from other artists, and partly to assist the media outlet in continuing its operation to the best of their capacity (being able to financially support their writers, curators etc). The attitude of most independent artists is that media is an important cog in the wheel of building awareness for releases and for artist projects overall, however, are often not willing to purchase media space on outlets - convinced that their music / project should be shared for free. Artists feel this way for a number of reasons - lack of budgeting, naivety around pricing, not seeing it as a valuable source of awareness, being wary of the legitimacy of outlet, and even an ego-driven opinion that they “deserve” free press.

Before we go any further into detail, let’s help you gain some clarity over this topic with some straight up yes or no questions that we receive daily:

Q: Is paying for media bad?

A: No

Q: Shouldn’t all media be free for artists’ exposure?

A: No

Since the earliest days of advertising, businesses have needed to pay for space to gain awareness of their product / service and music in 2021 / 2022 is no different.

“At the end of the day artists are paying overpriced PR companies to try and attain media for them anyway. What artists are ultimately paying for is access to a relationship. So really, why pay a PR agent a large amount of your budget, when you could budget for media opportunities that will actually benefit your project awareness & create your own media relationships at the same time.

We have said a lot that with the saturation of the industry, media is becoming less and less beneficial for artists with the rise of social media to a mature point, but if the attention matches the investment on a platform and there is a chance to form a meaningful working relationship with that platform, then it is most likely worth it.

It’s absolutely a case by case thing” - Anthony Agostino (Co Founder of Cartel Management Australia)

Things to consider when a platform asks you to pay for media space

What is your release budget?:

Every release should have some form of budget attached to it. Paying for media / ad space is really no different than getting your single mixed and mastered from an external source that you pay for. Prior to your release we would advise more established artists to have money put aside for advertising on social media, to drive traffic to digital stores to maximise streaming and audience by in. A portion of that budget could also be allocated for media (online features / reviews / playlists etc) to give the release and your artist project some 3rd party endorsement.

For less established artists we would recommend not overly worrying about paying for media and putting all budget into social media while trying to develop solid relationships with media outlets, curators etc.

Where is the attention of the audience you are trying to reach?:

Creating an artist brand that is a sustainable career often relies on how an artist can grow their audience base. It is VITAL for artists to understand where their audience is consuming their music and then aim to understand how to reach and maintain them. Over the past 18 months with COVI 19 fundamentally shifting the way artists are thinking about their releases, there has also been a shift in attention from the audience. New platforms such as Tik Tok, Clubhouse, Discord, Twitch are revolutionizing the way artists can reach and maintain audiences, leaving traditional online media as more of a form of a 3rd party endorsement rather than a filter for new audiences.

In this market artists can reach and meaningfully engage more audience, than an online magazine or radio play can, but that doesn't mean that media doesn't play a role in the perception of growth. We suggest to artists (particularly when paying) to only utilise media that serves as an endorsement to a fanbase. For example you should already be hitting audiences on multiple platforms with content and engagement techniques etc, then if an audience member is scrolling down a newsfeed and sees that a magazine has posted a article on you or your music, it serves as an endorsement from an industry professional that the music, and your project is 'worth it'.

A lot of artists utilise media as reaching a milestone, or as mass exposure to fanbases, but the reality is that online media is simply there to provide endorsement. This should be a massive factor when deciding whether or not to pay for media space; Challenge yourself to think about the following

- *Is this form of media in line with an audience I am trying to reach?* (Remember they may not necessarily engage a massive audience, but it will provide endorsement of the project to the people it does come across)

- *Will the audience of this media outlet be likely to like the music / the project?*

Do your research.:

Doing research into the audience, engagement, and rough statistics of the media outlet you are after is essentially you doing due diligence for your music to be placed in the right spots to maximise awareness. It also ensures that you are placing budget into the correct parts of the campaign to maximise the growth of your project.

Based on the informed research you should be doing into the outlets, should give you a really good indication of the return you will get.

For example, if you paid x amount for a top 5 placement in an independently curated spotify playlist that has a high following, and your research suggests that over a week period the top 5 songs in that playlist are receiving daily boosts in stream numbers, that would suggest that it is a good decision to move forward.

At the end of it all the decision to pay for media space is a decision that is left up solely to the artist. Our advice to artists trying to make that decision is simple, consider what it's going to do for your project. If it is going to help, move

forward, if it isn't actually going to engage an audience then put your budget into other areas of the project. Overall creating relationships with the media should be front of mind over the price.