



# The Music Licensing Manifesto

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I'm happy to say, that after 17 years of working in the licensing space, both licensing my own music since 2002, and running my website, [How To License Your Music dot com](http://HowToLicenseYourMusic.com) since 2008, I feel like I finally, truly “get” the music licensing industry, at least to the extent that “getting” a business like this is actually possible.

I'll admit it. I'm a slow learner. There were of course pieces of the business that I've understood and have been able to assimilate along the way. I've had a lot of “aha” moments about music and the music business over the last 17 years, many of which I've shared on my [blog](#), [podcast](#) and in my courses over the last few years. The business has also changed a lot since I started back in 2002, and my understanding of the business has evolved and changed alongside the changes in the industry.

But lately, I feel like I really “get” this industry in a much clearer way than I did when I was younger, and in a much clearer way than even just a few years ago. It’s taken a lot of trial and error, ups and downs, spending a lot of money, experimenting with different styles of music, working with a variety of musicians, vocalists, publishers and producers and so on, to get here.

I’ve made multiple trips to places like LA and Nashville since I started and have attended multiple conferences and seminars over the years. I attended Berklee for two years, from age 19 to 21, where I learned everything I could about songwriting and how the business of songwriting works. I then moved back to Chicago, where I’m from originally, finished college at Eastern Illinois University with a degree in music, then formed a band in the city and spent about a decade playing in bands in and around Chicago, learning everything I could about performing and the business of playing live music.

It took me a long time to figure out how to fit all the pieces of the music business together in a way that would sustain me comfortably. But gradually, over the years, after a lot persistence and hard work, it happened. “It” meaning I figured out how to support myself solely from my passion for music and the music I make. A significant part of my income these days comes from licensing, and this becomes more the case each year as my catalog and the income it generates grows.

In this post I’m going to focus on licensing and share some of my missteps along the way. I’m also going to share some of the realizations I’ve had over the last few years that has led to quadrupling my licensing income over the last two years or so.

This post is going to be a little longer than usual, because my goal is to layout *ALL* the fundamentals you need to understand in order to succeed at licensing your music in one single, epic post. I’m calling this

post “*The Music Licensing Manifesto*” because this is my attempt to explain, in a single post, all of the principles it takes to succeed at music licensing.

If you want to go deeper into these topics and how to succeed in music licensing, be sure to [check out our premium site](#). [How To License Your Music Premium](#) has over 200 hours of in depth, premium content about every possible topic related to music licensing you’ll find. We go deep and granular on very specific topics like music production, music marketing, music supervision, networking, music publishing and much more. We provide daily licensing leads, monthly webinars, in depth courses, directories and resources and more. [Learn more here](#).

In the meantime, absorb the information in this “manifesto”. My goal with this manifesto is to make this a document you can return to over and over again, whenever you’re feeling stuck or lost, sort of like the way you’d pull out a map on a journey, whenever you get lost or off track.

This “manifesto” doesn’t have all the answers, related to every single action you’ll need to take, but it provides a very thorough overview of the basic steps you’ll need to take to succeed in licensing your music. It doesn’t address every possible hypothetical situation you’ll encounter on the path to licensing success, but it will point you in the right, overall direction. This “manifesto” is, literally, the result of 17 years of experience and time working in this industry.

So, with that said, are you ready?

Let’s get started....

## Attitude & Mindset

I think your attitude going into this is probably the single most important piece of the puzzle, in terms of being successful, which is why I want to mention the topic of attitude and mindset first.

You have to have a positive mindset that is determined to succeed. This probably sounds pretty cliché at this point, but clichés exist for a reason. Usually there is at least an element of truth to clichés. This one is no exception.

The music business is challenging, but success *is possible* and attainable. You have to know and believe that going into this on a deep level. Don't approach this as if success in music licensing is akin to winning the lottery. I think that, in retrospect, I approached the music business this way for a long time, because on some fundamental level, that's what I thought. It was drilled into me from a very young age that being a successful musician would be hard, if not almost impossible, and I think I sort of internalized this mindset from a young age. Sure, I wanted to succeed at music, and I told everyone that's what I intended to do. But looking back, I don't know if I really, truly believed that. I think deep down I was scared shitless that I was going to fail and that I was making a colossal life error and was going to be destined to live a life of struggle.

That was a mistake looking back, because you can succeed based on your hard work and efforts alone, *IF* you truly understand the business and the steps you need to take, many of which I will outline below. I think a lot of musicians are completely in the dark about the business and feel like this is all one giant roulette table. It can sure seem that way, but the odds of success are much, much better than roulette, if you understand the business and how things work. You can tilt the

odds in your favor if you take the time to truly understand the business and the needs of those working in it and you persist in reaching your goals.

And to be clear, I'm talking specifically about the licensing aspect of the music business. Becoming a rock star ala Justin Bieber may actually be sort of analogous to winning the lottery. There is a lot of luck involved in that level of success. But, [he doesn't seem too happy these days](#) anyway, so I'm not even sure that would be a desirable goal to aim for. [Britney Spears isn't happy either](#). It's pretty clear at this point that massive fame doesn't automatically equate to happiness, and could even exacerbate mental health issues in some cases. So, let's set aside that particular goal for the sake of this manifesto and focus on success we can actually attain, based on our hard work alone.

When it comes to licensing, your actions, responses to challenges and the steps you take will ultimately determine whether or not you succeed. It's really that simple and in the following sections of this "manifesto" I'll outline what those steps are and what you should focus on.

When I look back over the last ten to fifteen years at the periods where I floundered the most and when success seemed to be the most elusive, if I'm completely honest with myself and with you, my attitude at the time played a big role in why I wasn't progressing. [I was my biggest obstacle](#). Of course, at the time, I couldn't see this, and I felt like my attitude and the way I approached things was justified. In a way it probably was, because I was simply reacting to things and approaching the business the best way I knew how at the time, based on the limited tools, resources and knowledge I had at my disposal.

Let me give you an example: After the first few songs I licensed, which I all paid a producer to produce for me, I started seeking out more cost-

effective ways to produce my tracks. I wanted to keep my costs down so that I could make a larger profit. This wasn't an inherently bad strategy, but I ended up creating a lot of tracks myself or with other inexperienced, but cheaper, producers that simply weren't good enough to license.

I didn't have the skills or the tools at the time to create tracks that met the needs of those I was working with. This resulted in a sort of two steps forward, one step back period, where I tried and experimented with different production strategies until I eventually found a new system that worked and was sustainable. During this period a lot of my tracks were getting rejected because I was unwilling and perhaps a bit afraid to invest properly in the production of my tracks. I didn't want to lose money and I didn't have the confidence I needed at the time to take the necessary steps to move forward, in terms of investing in better gear, more skilled producers and so on. I wasn't convinced I would see a good return on my investment.

My mistake, in retrospect, is that I was unwilling to take an initial loss on my songs in order to create long term passive income. I tried to cut corners wherever I could to keep my costs down. I used to think that if I created a song that landed me a thousand dollar placement, that song shouldn't cost me more than 500 dollars to create. This thinking wasn't completely wrong, the goal is to make money after all. But what I failed to realize early on, is that one track that initially created a thousand dollars in revenue, has the potential to generate many more thousands of dollars in the future, over the life of the song. In other words, this is a long-term game and you have to think long term in order to create long term, sustainable success.

This leads me to the second point that you need to be aware of, when creating a business out of licensing music....

## Invest In Your Success

You have to invest in your career. In other words, “it takes money to make money”. Many years of being a struggling musician and feeling the pain of not having a lot of money, led to me becoming pretty frugal with my money. I spent the better part of a decade in my twenties and early thirties going for music with all I had. I spent a lot of time and money chasing my dreams during this period and over the years I went down a lot of dead-end roads. As a result, I became much more conservative and careful in how I invested my time and money. I got burned a few times and made some bad decisions that set me back financially.

You have to be careful with your money and where you invest it. But, you have to realize that you are most likely going to need to invest money into this initially, if you intend to turn this into a career. It’s almost inevitable, unless you have really rich parents or investors or you find a large bag of cash lying around, which has never happened to me even once. You’ll need to invest money in equipment, producers (if you don’t produce your music), education and training and so on. The key is knowing when and how to invest money and when spending money is a wise decision, and conversely, when it’s not.

A lot of musicians are only spending money on things they feel confident they can instantly recoup. This was my mindset for a long time. But licensing needs to be approached like a business and most businesses do not make money right out of the gate. In fact, many businesses are in debt, at least on paper, for many years before they become truly profitable. For example, it took Twitter a decade to become consistently profitable. Most businesses start out in debt and only over time become truly profitable.

Of course, you probably won't have access to the same amount of capital as companies like Twitter do to keep you afloat in the beginning. That's ok. Think of your licensing business as like a mini twitter or mini Facebook. Your goal is going to be to build a business that, over time, will grow and deliver consistent profits. But it's going to take time to get there and you're going to have expenses along the way. You'll probably have to operate "in the red" for awhile initially.

You don't have to spend or risk a ton of money right out the gate if your risk averse or not in a position to invest a lot. You can start small and scale things as you go. But, and this is the key, when you see something that is working, you have to invest in those areas and nurture them if you want growth. If something is working on a small scale, double down and invest back into what's working. If you license one of your songs, find out why that song worked and produce ten more like it. When those songs start making you money, create 100 more like those and so on. This is how you scale a licensing business. You have to keep growing, creating new music and investing back into your business.

### **Educate Yourself**

One of the things you should be doing, on a regular basis, is educating yourself about the business. Before you jump head first into this, spend a ton of money, and create hundreds of songs that may or may not work for licensing, make sure you take the time, upfront, to really research the industry. Get a feel for what kinds of songs are licensed and why and figure out where you and your music fit into things.

You could be making amazing music that's too obscure for licensing and that there isn't really a demand for. Succeeding in licensing is all about serving the needs of your clients and helping them get their musical needs met. So, before you start just blindly shopping your music



around, take some time to really look around at what music is being licensed where and by who. Educate yourself about the business.

Your education will come in a few different ways. You can research and learn a lot about the business online. You can go to publishers and music libraries' websites and check out the kind of projects they're working on, check out the artists they work with and so on. The more you understand the business and learn how music is licensed, the better decisions you'll tend to make in terms of reaching out to the right people, with the right music.

A lot of people ask me what tracks they should send when initially reaching out to someone. The answer is you should be sending the most relevant tracks you have for each submission. Licensing isn't an exact science, so you'll often be making educated guesses. But if you've taken the time to learn about the people and companies you're pitching your music to, you'll be able to make an informed decision about what tracks you send them.

You can also educate yourself by [listening to my free podcast](#), where I interview a variety of people succeeding in the licensing space. I find people succeeding at a high level and I ask them how they did it. There are tons of gems in my podcast. Check it out.

You can also educate yourself by [checking out our in-depth courses and webinars](#). Our [premium members](#) get access to hundreds of hours of in-depth content where we dive deep into all things music licensing related. We have [in-depth courses](#) on music production for licensing, music mastering, music marketing, writing tracks for tv and commercials, working with Logic, pitching to supervisors and much, much more. The more you understand going into this business, the quicker you'll succeed.

If you want to sample our courses first, we're even offering a [completely free, four-hour audio/video course](#) that you can check out right away called "The Ultimate Music Licensing Guide". No strings attached. Get "The Ultimate Music Licensing Guide" [here](#).

## **Create A Catalog Of Music**

Ok, so you've developed a great mindset and attitude, you've invested in yourself and you've educated yourself about the business, now comes the fun part: The music.

The next thing you should do, on your music licensing journey, is to start creating an amazing catalog of music. How many songs do you need? Great question. I don't have a precise answer, but think about it this way, the income you make will more than likely, be directly proportionate to the size of your catalog. The more songs you make, the more songs you'll be able to license. The more topics and moods your songs address, the more potential scenes and uses your music will be a good fit for. The more songs you license, the more money you'll make.

Your ongoing mission should be to create a diverse, vibrant catalog of amazing music that will meet the needs of the licensing community you'll be serving. Of course, you don't need hundreds of songs to get started, but your goal should always be to create more songs that will work for more productions, shows, films, ads and so on. At the end of the day, this is what it's all about; making music.

The money you invest initially should be on tools and resources to help you get to a place where you can consistently create high quality music on an ongoing basis that is "on target" for licensing. If you're going to be producing your own tracks, then obviously you need to invest in things like instruments, recording equipment, your DAW, microphones

and so on. If you're going to be working with other producers, then you'll need to have some sort of budget for your recording projects that you can afford on a regular basis as you're building your catalog and creating music for projects you pitch to.

Where will you get the money for all of this? Well, unfortunately, I don't have any top-secret sources of money to tell you about. Licensing music isn't a get rich quick scheme. It's a business and like any other business, it's going to take time and money to build and turn into something profitable. The most likely solution is that in the beginning, you'll probably need to have some sort of day job that will allow you to sustain yourself and invest into your licensing business as you're getting started. I was a guitar teacher when I got started and did that for seven years until I was making enough money from all my side projects to stop doing that. Bottom line: everyone's situation is different. Do whatever it takes.

### **The New Music Licensing Paradigm**

Back in the day, there was this model that bands and artists seemed to follow, that went something like this:

- 1) Record and release an "album" of ten to twelve tracks
- 2) Tour for two years or so to promote the album
- 3) Repeat

That was the model that worked for recording/touring artists for many years. I think that a lot of artists my age are sort of stuck in that paradigm. They're still looking at the music industry through the lens of the old model. They're not adapting to the new music industry.

The old model worked when people were buying millions of albums and it probably still works for a few elite bands and artists. But the

above model doesn't really apply to licensing at all. If you're only creating ten tracks every couple years, it's going to be really hard to turn that into a full time revenue stream. Of course, there are always exceptions and I know a couple artists that do pretty well with small, niche catalogs. But for most artists, you're going to need volume. You're going to need to create a lot of music if you're hoping to make a lot of money. Remember, more music = more money.

And if you think about, this is good news! You went into this because you love making music, right? Yeah? Well, great, you're going to get to make a lot of it as you build your licensing catalog.

And here's the really cool thing: This all might seem a little daunting in the beginning. But in my experience, when you get into a flow of writing a lot of music and creating music more frequently, more and more songs and ideas come! When you get into the habit of writing music on a daily basis, it starts to feel as if you're priming your musical pump, and the songs and inspiration just keep coming. These days, I never run out of song ideas or feel I lack inspiration. In fact, my biggest problem these days is trying to keep up with all my song ideas and get them recorded and produced quickly enough. I have a backlog of like 20 songs right now, that are all in various stages of production and I've written three new songs in the last week or so. When you really get into this, you can get into a rhythm and flow with songwriting and composing that is truly amazing. The more music you compose and create, the easier it gets.

Bottom line: Work towards creating a large, diverse catalog of music. More music = more money. (Of course, the music needs to high quality.)

Ok, moving along.

## **Networking And Persistence**

So, to recap, at this stage in your journey, you:

- 1) Have an amazing, positive attitude and you know deep down you can succeed at this. You'll of course have some ups and downs on your journey, but you're staying strong and are determined to push through the challenges as they inevitably arise.
- 2) You've invested properly into yourself and your business in terms of gear, recording equipment and production costs, to the extent that you feel comfortable with, based on your situation.
- 3) You've educated yourself about the business and have a good grasp on the kind of music being licensed, where it's being licensed and who is licensing it.
- 4) You've started to create an amazing catalog of music that will work for a wide variety of licensing situations. I suggest having a solid 20 tracks or so to start with. You could have less than this, there are really no hard and fast rules, but the more tracks you have, the more likely you'll find a few projects your music is a good fit for.

At this point in your journey, you're ready to start bringing your music and your catalog to market. In other words, you're ready to start making connections and pitching your tracks to people and companies who license music.

Who should you send your music to? Do some research and figure it out. There are tons of resources both online and offline to help you get started. [How To License Your Music Premium](#) posts daily licensing leads and also has contact information for over 2,000 libraries, publishers and supervisors. Google is a great resource for finding individual music libraries and supervisors. There are a variety of conferences and seminars related to licensing. The information is readily available if you take the time to find it.

For this step, you need to go back and revisit the first part of this manifesto regarding your attitude and mindset. This is the part of the journey where you'll more than likely face a few setbacks, rejection, unanswered emails and so forth. This is all normal and is a part of the process for most artists that end up succeeding in this industry. None of us are batting 100 and none of us are a perfect match for everyone we pitch our music to.

However, the good news is that if you actually took the time to do all the steps I outlined above, your odds of success are way higher than most. If you've put in the work at the beginning and you have a catalog of music ready to go, that you know works for licensing, based on actual research, you will eventually succeed. It will take time, but YOU WILL succeed if you follow these steps.

How long will it take? I wish I could tell you. Everyone is a different. There are simply too many variables involved to tell you how long it will take you to succeed. It depends on a variety of factors, including the music you make, the quality of your music, the style of your music, how aggressively you promote it, how often you pitch it, where you pitch it, and so on and so forth.

Most of the artists that I know who are making a full time living doing this, have been at this at least a few years. The nature of the licensing

business is such that it takes time to build connections, generate placements, get paid for placements and so on. But keep in mind that you are building a business that has potential to sustain you for many years. You are building your own “mini-twitter” or “mini-facebook”. Don’t forget that as you move forward. Work smart, be strategic and think long term.

When you start pitching your music and you start finding places that like your music and want to work with you, focus on those relationships. If you sign ten songs to a company and they get you a couple placements, thank them and offer to send them 20 more tracks. Double down on anything that is working and keep expanding.

At the same time, keep reaching out to new people and making new connections. Don’t rely on just one company to get you placements. Diversify. Have so much music, with so many places, that if one or two sources of income dry up, you still have ten more in the pipeline that will step up and assure that you always have positive cash flow. While that’s happening, keep making new music and creating new connections and relationships. Again, think of this like a business, because that’s exactly what it is.

## **Wash. Rinse. Repeat**

If you actually do all of the steps outlined in this manifesto, you will succeed. I can't tell you how long it will take you and I can't tell you exactly how your success will play out, but eventually, if you follow these steps, you'll be successful. Once you start having success, you just have to keep repeating the steps that led to your initial success. If you find a library that likes your tracks and they get you a few placements, nurture and cultivate that relationship. Send them more tracks. Find out what they need and how you can help them. At the same time, always keep making new connections, creating new tracks and building new revenue streams. This isn't a business where you can rest on your laurels and get complacent.

The path to success in music licensing is not a mystery. It's not about luck or getting lucky. This music licensing business isn't a giant casino with lucky winners and unlucky losers. The music licensing business is a business. When you understand how the business works, how to meet the needs of the marketplace and how to consistently deliver a quality product, you'll win.

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I hope you've enjoyed "The Music Licensing Manifesto". Like I said at the beginning, I see this post as a sort of map of how to succeed in music licensing. Evaluate where you are now based on the steps I've outlined. Maybe you've already taken some of the necessary steps on your journey and you're on your way to success, but just need to keep going. Use this manifesto to figure out what the next steps are. Maybe you're completely new to the business and you're not sure where to even start. Use this manifesto as a map moving forward and refer to it as needed on your journey to success.



If you want to explore the topics discussed in this post further, be sure to check out our free four-hour audio/video course called “[The Ultimate Music Licensing Guide](#)”. This four-hour program breaks down the steps you need to take to succeed at music licensing even more extensively than this post. The course, like this manifesto, is completely free and you can [get it here](#).

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