



MUSIC BUSINESS 101

3 deals.

3 cuts.

Know yours.

Publisher, co-publisher or admin: who does what, what they take, and what you keep. Only an admin leaves your songs 100% yours.



Your song's money has 2 halves.

Publishing is the money side of the song itself: the melody and lyrics, not the recording. In the US, your PRO (performing rights organization, like ASCAP or BMI) splits the song's performance money 50/50: a writer's share, paid straight to you, and a publisher's share. Publishing deals decide who owns or collects that publisher's share.



No deal?

You are the publisher.

- 01** Most ASCAP songwriters publish their own music. In the US:
- 02** ASCAP: set up a publishing company with ASCAP to collect the publisher's half. Fees are waived if you join as writer and publisher at the same time (ASCAP calls this temporary).
- 03** BMI: with no publisher listed, both halves go straight to you.



A traditional publisher usually owns your publishing.

A publisher pitches your songs to artists and music supervisors (who pick music for film and TV), licenses them and collects. In return, a traditional deal generally means giving up 100% of your publishing rights, says Songtrust, an admin company. Your writer's share still comes to you from your PRO.



A co-publishing deal splits the publisher's half.

You keep 100% of your writer's share and 50% of the publisher's share. That's 75% of your total publishing royalties, in Songtrust's example. Real deals vary, so read yours line by line.



An admin deal leaves you the owner.

A publishing administrator (admin) registers your songs with pay sources around the world and collects for you. It owns no part of your songs. Songtrust, an admin company, puts the fee at 15% to 25% of the publisher's share, typically for 1 to 3 years. Its own price, as an example: \$100 once per songwriter, then 15% of performance royalties and 20% of other royalties it collects.



An advance gets paid back.

Some publishing deals come with an advance: money paid up front. It isn't a gift. The publisher pays itself back out of the song royalties it collects for you before it pays you anything more.



1 more sign-up: The MLC.

In the US, The MLC (Mechanical Licensing Collective) collects the song's royalty from streams and downloads, called a mechanical. Self-published? Join free and register your songs. Have an admin? It generally registers them for you. Money nobody claimed from 2021 starts being shared out by market share, to the songs that did earn, in April 2027.



Before you sign, ask 4 questions.

- 1. Do I keep ownership of my songs?**
- 2. What percentage do you take, and of which money?**
- 3. How long does the deal last?**
- 4. Is there an advance, and how is it paid back?**

Some admin companies also distribute recordings, so know which service you signed up for. Have a lawyer read any deal before you sign.



Know who takes what, before you sign.

Save this. Send it to your co-writer.

Sources: ASCAP, BMI, The MLC, Songtrust

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Then

- Have a lawyer read any deal before you sign.

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