



By Gareth Shute

HOW TO CHOOSE A STREAMING SERVICE & GET THE MOST OUT OF IT

There's more options than ever before for getting your music online. Each has certain benefits and drawbacks, so here's an introduction to some of the main ones so you can choose which one will suit you best.

SOUNDCLOUD

Soundcloud is one of the easiest services to use if you simply want to put up music for people to hear, without too much concern for making money. A 'Soundcloud Basic' account allows you to upload 3 hours of music for free. You also have the option of making tracks private if you just want to share a track with someone - e.g., if you want to play it to a label or potential collaborator without it being publically accessible.

There are some music scenes that dominate Soundcloud - in particular electronic/dance music and hip hop. In these cases, it allows producers to put up new tracks or mixtapes that they've just made instantly and get feedback (comments can even be placed at a particular spot in a track, allowing respondents to specify exactly which parts of the track they liked).

A community has developed, which then helps the best tracks get shared and discussed more broadly. If word spreads far enough then it can give an artist a big boost, as when Katikati producer Montell2099 had a track re-posted by US producer, Sango (Montell now has over 46,000 followers on Soundcloud and has collaborated with US rapper, 21 Savage).

In this way, Soundcloud is used more like a experimental sandbox, with dud tracks being deleted easily while the best tracks can be kept up long-term or taken down and moved to one of the other streaming services to gain more exposure.



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BANDCAMP

Bandcamp also allows acts to quickly upload their work and tap into a community of listeners (especially in genres such as indie rock and underground hip hop). Some artists have created a following by releasing early lo-fi recordings on bandcamp and thereby connecting with an audience that supported them as they developed their sound. For example, overseas acts like Car Seat Headrest and Frankie Cosmos were prolific at putting their early recordings on bandcamp before finally signing to established labels.

As soon as an artist puts a track on bandcamp, people can not only stream the track online, but they are also given the opportunity to purchase it as a download. Artists have the choice of charging what they want for their music or letting buyers choose a price. The music is then able to be downloaded in a range of file types from simple mp3s through to larger lossless formats. The other bonus of bandcamp is that it's easy to use it to sell CDs, cassettes, and vinyl as well as other merch. The site charges 10% of merch sales and 15% of downloads (and you can use it to give free downloads to people who bought physical copies, since each artist account comes with 200 free download codes).

A pro account cost \$10 a month and gives the act more access to features - e.g., in-depth stats, discount codes, and private tracks. However, it's certainly possible to get quite far along without requiring these additional features.

SPOTIFY, APPLE MUSIC, ETC

When it comes to streaming, Spotify and Apple Music are currently the biggest in our region - giving local acts the possibility to get their music out to a worldwide audience (Spotify alone claims to have had 159 million monthly users in 2017). However, there are many other services fighting for a place in the market such as Tidal, Napster, Deezer, and YouTube/Google (see below). Amazon also has a music platform ('Prime' which is part of Amazon Premium) which has become an important player within the US market and has recently become available in New Zealand.

The actual payment per stream is rather small - on average, it's probably near 0.5c (NZ) though it varies between platforms and also depending on whether the stream was from a paid or free account (this is perhaps slightly higher than overseas because of larger number of paid accounts). So while a 100,000 streams of your track might show you have a solid footing in the local market, you would need to have streams in the millions to receive a decent income.

Individual artists can't upload their tracks directly to these services, but rather need to work through aggregators who can perform this for them. It is worthwhile leaving at least three weeks for a track to become live (especially if you want a chance for it to be considered for playlists), though at quiet times this process can move a bit quicker. In general, aggregators charge a yearly housing fee for carrying a track/album in their catalogue. In some cases, this housing fee might be very



low, but they will also take a percentage of royalties on top of this - the upside of this arrangement is that they will more motivated to get streams for your track.

The main major labels (Sony Music, Universal Music, Warner Music) all act as aggregators as well and there are some smaller outfits such as dunedinmusic.com. Alternatively, there are overseas aggregators such as Tunecore, Reverb Nation, and CDBaby (which tend not to take a percentage from royalties, but instead charge a large yearly housing fee).

The largest aggregator in New Zealand is Digital Rights Management (DRM). They have the added bonus of providing more of a wrap-around service, where they are able to give help and advice to new artists, then grow with them as they develop so their maximise their potential to get on playlists or be given artist-spotlights.

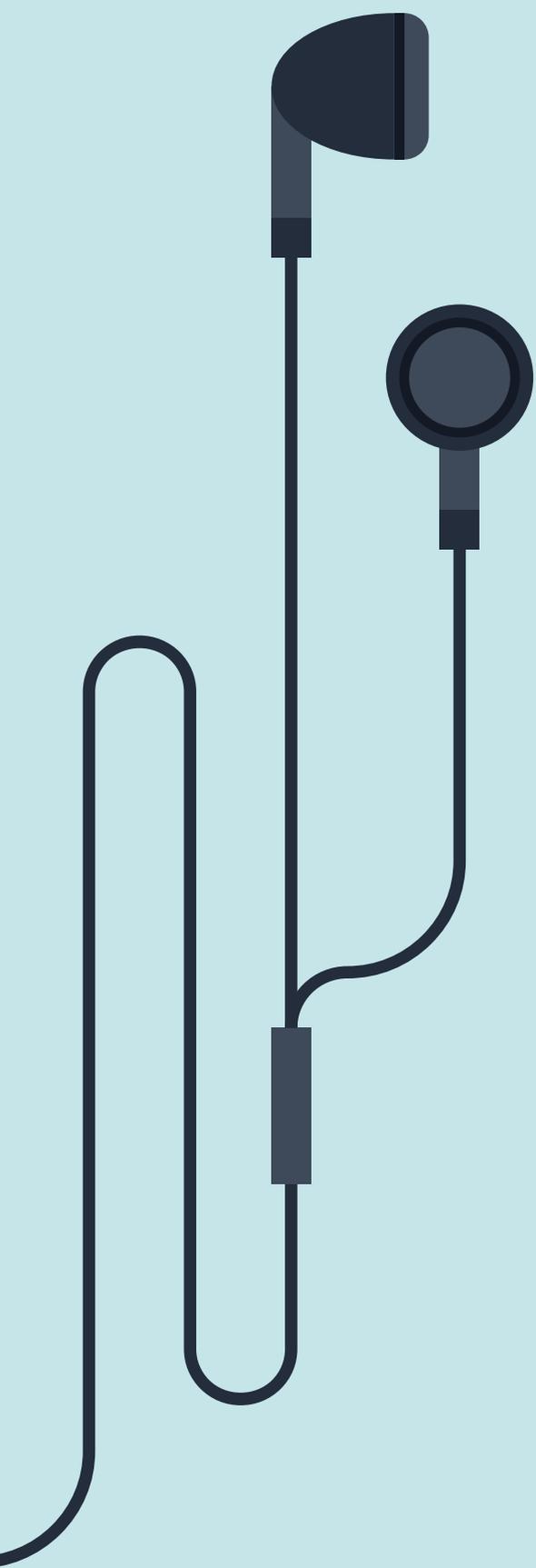
A prime example of an act who has found success via streaming services is Savage. His track 'Freaks' (with Timmy Trumpet) has pushed past 175 million streams on Spotify and this exposure not only provides an income but also allows him to tour regularly across Australia and to gain synch royalties through his music being used on ads or TV programs. So while the royalties offered by streaming services alone are often not enough to keep most artists afloat, they provide a platform that acts can use to reach fans across the globe.

YOUTUBE AND YOUTUBE MUSIC

YouTube has long been the central online home for music videos and the ability to monetise views has provided a different revenue stream for some acts. A prime example is Princess Chelsea, whose video 'Cigarette Duet' has over 40 million views (thus providing a reasonable possibility of ad revenue). However, it should be noted that a creators need 1000 subscribers and 4000 hours of watch time to be able to receive ad revenue. Therefore, this route may make more sense for labels (or collectives of artists) rather than individual acts since they will be more likely to surpass this threshold.

Newer artists may use YouTube simply to load up a track (with a basic image) in order to share their music with the world. If an act does gain the level of success that sees their music spreading across YouTube (via fan uploads or usage by vloggers, etc) then they may need to make use of YouTube's content ID system to unearth these unauthorised uses. For example, an artist who has their music aggregated via DRM would be able to get them to monitor their music's use in this way and then decide how to deal with these cases - eg by blocking those videos or monetising them on the act's behalf.

More recently, the teams from YouTube and Google Play Music have come together to create a new streaming service - YouTube Music. This service has its own app and requires artists to load their music through an aggregator, in the same way as they would for Apple Music and Spotify, etc. This potentially gives an opportunity for acts to connect their music videos homepage with their profile for the streaming platform.



ANALYTICS AND OTHER ADVANCED FEATURES

As an artist grows in popularity, they can gain some great insights into their listenership. Most of the services mentioned above give access to some information of this kind (usually called analytics), though getting more in-depth stats within Bandcamp and Soundcloud requires a paid account.

Other streaming providers usually have a dedicated website portal where artists can check how their songs are doing (such as “Apple Music For Artists” or “Spotify For Artists”). This provides a way for artists to find out information such as:

- what events seem to boost my streaming numbers - playing live shows and/or appearing in certain publications?
- are there particular cities/countries where my music is popular? (which might lead to tours or doing promotions in that region)
- did appearing on particular playlists or feature slots help with my streaming numbers?

You should also use this kind of backend access to make sure your profile is as complete as possible to increase the chances of a casual listener taking a deeper interest. For example, you can often add bio information, links, show dates and images to your profile page so why wouldn't you? It's all just part of the wider approach of getting your name out into the world.

WHICH SERVICE SHOULD I CHOOSE?

The choice of how to present your music online will depend on your overall aims as an artist and your approach might change over your career. Let's consider a fictional example to get an idea of how this might work.

Let's say that you're a hip hop producer hoping that a rapper will pick up one of your beats, so firstly you might put it on Soundcloud. It eventually gets shared around and turned into a track by an underground rapper with a strong, supportive fanbase. He puts it on his bandcamp page as 'pay-what-you-choose' since he knows his fans will likely give him at least a bit of money in appreciation for his music (and he also has T-shirts for sale). The pair of you make a second track and this time it seems like it could actually be a big pop hit, so you decide to put it on all the main streaming services, as well as YouTube in order to get as large an audience as possible. You hope that this might lead to other income, either through live shows (which you can list on Spotify page) or eager fans giving you money for older tracks through bandcamp. Meanwhile, your Soundcloud account is still there, allowing other rappers to consider working with you.

In short - there's no one answer that can be given about what service is right for you. The best approach is to school yourself on what the different options are and also do some research into what approaches similar acts on the local scene are taking to get their music out there. There may not be a perfect online service available to acts, but at least there are plenty of different avenues available out there that can give you more reach than ever before possible.