

**FREE
GUIDE**



How to Break Into the Music Business

The insider's guide to landing a real job in a
\$60 billion industry.



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This guide is based on the same principles taught every day at Dark Horse Institute by working music business professionals.

01

What is the music business — really?

Most people think the music business is about artists. It's not. It's about the infrastructure that surrounds artists — the people who find them, sign them, fund them, promote them, book them, distribute their music, and make sure they get paid.

The global recorded music industry is worth over \$60 billion annually — and that number doesn't include live events, licensing, merchandise, or the growing sync market. Behind every major release, every festival, every film score, and every streaming playlist is a team of business professionals making decisions that shape what the world hears.

The good news: most of those jobs don't require you to be famous. They require you to understand the business of music better than anyone else in the room.

The five pillars of the industry

1- Record Labels

Find, sign, develop, and release artists. Divided into A&R, marketing, distribution, legal, and finance departments. Major (Universal, Sony, Warner) and indie labels operate with different structures and opportunities.

2- Music Publishing

Represents songwriters and song catalogs. Publishers collect mechanical royalties, sync fees, and performance royalties on behalf of writers. One of the most lucrative and least understood revenue streams.

3- Live & Touring

The booking agency, promoter, tour manager, and venue ecosystem that make live music happen. Post-pandemic, live is the industry's biggest revenue driver and fastest-growing employer.

4- Sync Licensing

Placing music in film, TV, advertising, and video games. A single well-placed sync can earn more than an entire album release — and the demand for licensed music is growing faster than any other sector.

5- Distribution & Streaming

How music gets from a label or artist to Spotify, Apple Music, and retail. Digital distribution strategy — release timing, playlist pitching, metadata — is now a core professional skill.



02

The 8 roles with the most opportunity right now

These aren't entry-level dead ends — they're career starting points with real growth paths. Each role has both a major-label version and an independent version, giving you options at every stage.

Artist Manager \$45K–\$150K+

The most relationship-intensive role in the business. Managers oversee every aspect of an artist's career — strategy, deal negotiation, team coordination, and long-term brand development.

Booking Agent \$42K–\$120K+

Books live performances for artists. Works with venues, promoters, and festival programmers. Strong negotiation and market knowledge are the core competencies.

A&R Representative \$50K–\$130K+

Finds and develops new talent for record labels. Part talent scout, part creative director, part project manager. One of the most competitive roles — and one of the most rewarding.

Music Publisher / Licensing Rep \$48K–\$110K+

Manages song catalogs and pitches music for sync placements in TV, film, and advertising. The sync market is one of the few areas of the industry growing faster than streaming.

Label Marketing Manager \$52K–\$115K+

Plans and executes release campaigns across digital, social, and traditional channels. Requires both creative thinking and data fluency — playlist strategy, DSP marketing, and PR.

Tour / Production Manager \$50K–\$120K+

Manages the logistics of a touring operation — routing, budgets, crew, settlement. Experienced tour managers with major acts can earn significantly more.

Music Business Entrepreneur **Unlimited ceiling**

Launches an independent label, management company, publishing house, or creative agency. The most common long-term destination for DHI Music Business graduates.

Entertainment Law (pipeline role) **\$80K-\$200K+**

Negotiates and drafts recording, publishing, touring, and endorsement contracts. Music business training is the most common pre-law path for entertainment attorneys.



03

How the industry actually works

No one tells you this in music class. Here's how money, power, and opportunity actually flow through the industry.

Following the money

When a song is streamed, money flows in three directions: to the label (master rights), to the publisher (composition rights), and — after recoupment — to the artist. Understanding this three-way split is the foundation of everything else in music business.

Master Recording Rights

Owned by whoever paid for the recording — usually the label after signing. This is why record deals matter: whoever controls the master controls the primary revenue stream.

Composition Rights

Owned by the songwriter(s) and their publisher. Performance royalties (PROs like ASCAP, BMI, SESAC), mechanical royalties, and sync fees all flow through this side of the split.

Artist Royalties

The major labels — Universal, Sony, and Warner — control roughly 70% of global market share. But the independent sector is where most careers start, and where the music business is evolving fastest. Independent labels, self-releasing artists, and boutique management companies now operate with the same digital infrastructure as majors — and they move faster.

The independent vs. major divide

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\$60B+

Global music industry
annual revenue

67%

Recorded music revenue
is streaming

\$35B+

Live music
performance revenue

"I loved this course and all the things I learned at Dark Horse. The Music Business program gave me the knowledge and confidence to pursue real opportunities in the industry."

— Ryan Alexander, DHI Graduate
Audit Analyst, Warner Music Group | Previously: Universal Music Group



The skills that actually get people hired

A music business degree teaches you theory. A Dark Horse Institute training gives you the skills hiring managers actually ask for on day one. Here's the difference.

Contract Literacy

You don't need a law degree — but you need to read, understand, and negotiate recording contracts, publishing deals, management agreements, and touring riders without flinching. This is the single most valuable skill you can bring to any job in the industry.

- Recording and distribution agreements
- 360 deals and co-publishing structures
- Performance and sync licensing contracts
- Management commissions and term clauses

Digital Marketing & Release Strategy

Streaming platforms have made marketing the most in-demand skill in the business. Labels, management companies, and artists need people who can plan a release, pitch playlists, run social campaigns, and read analytics.

- Spotify for Artists, Apple Music for Artists
- Meta and TikTok advertising
- DSP editorial pitching and playlist strategy
- Release planning and rollout timelines

Artist Development & A&R Thinking

Identifying talent, shaping an artist's brand, and guiding creative direction are skills built through hands-on experience — not textbooks. At DHI, you do this with real artists.

- Scouting and evaluating emerging talent
- Brand positioning and image development
- A&R administration and project management
- Demo feedback and production direction

Financial Literacy for the Music Industry

Music business professionals who understand royalty accounting, tour budgeting, and deal economics are rare — and highly valued. Numbers fluency separates good music execs from great ones.

- Royalty statements and mechanical accounting
- Touring profit-and-loss modeling
- Label P&L, marketing budgets, and recoupment
- Publishing income streams and PRO reporting

05

How deals, contracts & careers get built

The most important thing to understand about the music business: everything runs on relationships and leverage. Deals don't happen in a vacuum — they happen between people who trust each other's judgment and know what each other needs.

How a record deal actually happens

1- Discovery

A&R reps are constantly scouting — live shows, streaming data, social media, referrals from producers and managers. The first filter is always: does this artist have something undeniable?

2- Development

Before any contract is signed, labels typically invest in development — demo recordings, image work, market positioning. This phase can last months and costs the label money with no guarantee.

3- Negotiation

Both sides bring lawyers. Points of contention: royalty rate, advance size, number of albums, creative control, marketing minimums, 360 participation, and reversion clauses.

4- Execution

The signed deal triggers a recording budget, a release timeline, and a marketing plan. This is where the music business team — marketing, PR, radio, digital — takes over from A&R.

5- Recoupment

The label recoups its investment from the artist's royalty share. Understanding this math — and structuring deals that protect the artist — is what separates skilled managers and attorneys from the rest.

Your 15-week roadmap from student to professional

Dark Horse Institute's Music Business program is 375 hours over 15 weeks — taught by professionals who have worked at the highest levels of the industry for 30+ years. Here's how the program unfolds.

Weeks 1–3 : Industry Foundations

- The structure of major and independent labels
- Music publishing, PROs, and royalty income streams
- Introduction to entertainment law and key contract types
- Scouting and curating artists for development

Weeks 4–7 : Artist Teams

- How to identify and build the perfect team for each artist
- Brand strategy, image development, and artist positioning
- Artist management contracts
- Publishing rights and licensing

Weeks 8–11 : Record Companies, Marketing, and Promotions

- Deciding between full independence, indie labels or major labels
- Release planning and rollout strategy
- Spotify, Apple Music, and DSP marketing
- Social media campaign design and execution
- Radio promotion, PR, and press outreach fundamentals

Weeks 12–14 : Touring, Live, and Merchandise

- Booking agency structure and routing strategy
- Tour budgeting, deal structures, and settlement
- Merchandise contracts, advances, and sell-through economics
- Festival strategy and brand partnership opportunities
- Book and organize a real showcase in a Nashville venue

Week 15 : Career Launch & Practicum

- Pitch your final artist project to a panel of industry professionals
 - Organize and run the real-world artist showcase
 - Complete your portfolio: artist plan, release strategy, contract analysis
 - Industry networking events and informational sessions
 - Career placement support — introductions, resume, and reel
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The program culminates in two real-world projects with actual industry connections and experiences. The first is a live pitch to working A&R executives, publishing executives, artists managers, and a panel of industry professionals. You leave with a completed artist development project, real contract analysis experience, and a professional network you built during the program — not after.

The second project is a full artist showcase in a Nashville venue. You will not only book the talent and venue but also promote and manage the event. This project takes the concepts learned throughout the program and brings them to life — building your resume and your confidence that you can make the moves to start your career immediately after graduation.

"After taking all three programs I truly appreciate my experience at Dark Horse Institute. They taught me how the music industry really works. My teachers were amazing."

— DHI Graduate
Music Business, Audio Engineering & Songwriting

Your next step

Ready to see it for yourself?

Book a campus tour in Franklin, TN

Walk the same studios where 65+ gold and platinum albums have been made. Tours include a campus walkthrough, curriculum overview, and optional class sit-in on morning visits. Schedule online or call 615.791.7020

Request a virtual appointment

Our admissions advisors offer structured 45-minute Zoom sessions with a virtual studio walkthrough and personalized program recommendation. No pressure — just honest answers.

Book at darkhorseinstitute.com

Take the free Music Career quiz

Not sure which program fits your goals? Our 3-minute quiz delivers a personalized report on your strengths and best-fit roles.

darkhorseinstitute.com/quiz
