



YouTube FOR MUSICIANS



BUILDING THE FOUNDATIONS FOR A SUCCESSFUL CHANNEL



YouTube is the 2nd largest search engine in the world, one of the most powerful music discovery tools in human history, and the first place many talent buyers, festival bookers, and other industry professionals will look when they're considering your music for an opportunity.

This guide will serve as a quick primer to help you:



Optimize your channel
and videos



Increase video
engagement



Better understand
YouTube revenue streams

It shouldn't take you much more than thirty minutes to read through this guide, but if you're just starting to familiarize yourself with using YouTube as a music promotion tool, the recommendations within will keep you busy for a long time to come.

Alright, let's get started...



THE ANATOMY OF A HIGHLY OPTIMIZED YOUTUBE VIDEO

You probably put a lot of time into producing your videos and you're excited to publish them on YouTube. But don't rush! Spend the extra few minutes optimizing your videos, making it easier for users to find and share them. Otherwise some of your hard work and creativity could go to waste.

The YouTube video optimization checklist:

- Choose a good video title** — It all begins here. A good (accurate) title helps viewers know they're in the right place, and a keyword-rich title is crucial for users to find your video when searching YouTube.
- Upload a custom thumbnail** — The thumbnail gives people a snapshot of your video. To hook viewers, upload a custom image that teases something exciting in the video. Your thumbnail image should have a 16:9 aspect ratio.
- Insert YouTube cards** — Add some interactivity to your video when it's viewed on most desktop, Android, and iOS devices. [You can use cards](#) to link viewers to a specific URL, point them to another video or playlist, ask them to subscribe, and more.
- List relevant tags** — Enter any keywords that are associated with your video content, location, subject matter, or featured artists. Good tags can boost your ranking in YouTube search results. Stumped for how to tag your video? Try searching for similar content in YouTube and see what they auto-suggest.
- Write a good video description** — Like your title, your video description helps power YouTube's search function, so be sure to make use of this space with good keywords, a compelling description of your video, and links to your website, social profiles, retail store, etc. If you want to get viewers to leave YouTube (to go to your own website, for instance) put that URL at the very beginning of your video description so it will appear before the "show more" section.
- Use an intro** — Create a short intro (1-5 seconds) that can be used across multiple videos in a series to provide your channel with a sense of cohesion, continuity, and vibe. You can upload an intro to YouTube as a private video, and then use the video editor tool to combine that intro with any new videos you want to publish.
- Create HD videos** — In the Settings section, a viewer can change the speed and quality of your video, so make sure you upload the highest quality video possible (ideally at least 720p or 1080p).
- Add End Screens** — With [mobile-friendly end screens](#), you can drive more engagement at the end of your videos, directing viewers to other videos or playlists, asking them to subscribe to your channel, offering merch, and more.
- Put your video in a playlist** — Add your video to a playlist and, whenever you share the video, embed the "share with playlist starting from current video" code. That way if a viewer clicks "next," you can lead them to another one of your videos.

Now that we've looked at optimizing your videos, how about optimizing your whole channel?



A QUICK-START TO OPTIMIZING YOUR YOUTUBE CHANNEL

Here's a simple checklist you can reference to make sure you're doing everything you can to boost views, build a loyal audience, and earn more money through YouTube.

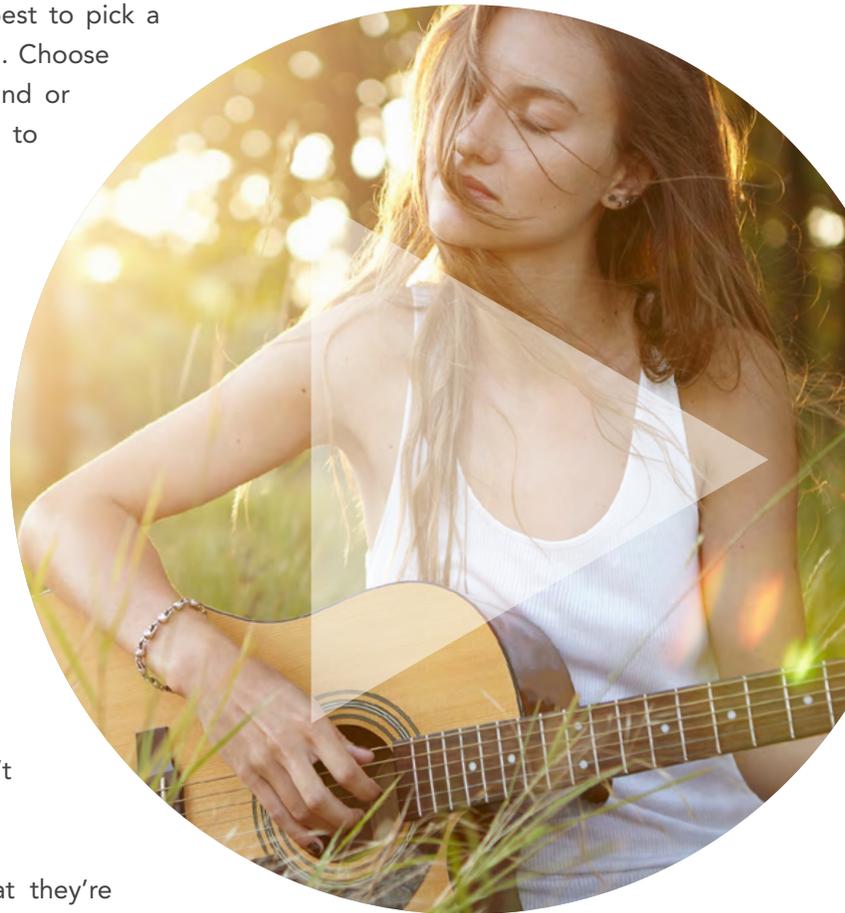
1. Choose your channel name — The channel name is different from your channel URL, so this name CAN be edited. But it's best to pick a name and stick with it for consistent channel branding. Choose something that is short and memorable (like your band or artist name), and that also lets viewers know what to expect from your channel.

2. Choose your channel icon — Upload a square, high-res image that is recognizable and looks great when displayed at smaller resolutions (so use text sparingly). This image will be your channel's icon throughout all of YouTube.

3. Upload your channel art — Channel art is the banner/header that appears towards the top of your channel when viewed on a desktop. Upload a large image with the most important visual elements located in the inner area (so they'll still appear when the image is scaled for mobile and tablet). Make sure your channel art reflects your personality and doesn't just come off as some kind of boring brand logo.

4. Write a channel description — Tell viewers what they're about to experience. Be sure to highlight the most important content you create, use relevant keywords, and include your upload schedule to set expectations for your audience.

5. Add website and social media links to the About tab — Corresponding icons will be displayed as overlays on your channel art. Include links to your official website, store or product page, social accounts, newsletter signup form, or promotional campaign pages.





6. Set “Featured Channels” — On the right-hand side of your channel, you’ll see the “Featured Channels” header. Add any related or similar channels, including channels for other creative projects you’re involved in, your record label, etc.

7. Customize your channel layout and enable discussion — If you’d like to customize the way content appears on your channel and also allow fans to comment on your channel, go to your “Channel Settings” page and enable both features.

8. Select or upload a channel trailer — Once the browse view has been enabled, select a channel trailer video for your channel. A channel trailer is a short video that will autoplay whenever an unsubscribed viewer visits your channel, so here’s your opportunity to get them hooked!

Your trailer should be informative and fit the overall vibe of your channel (oh, and did we mention it should be brief?). Also, you should ask viewers to subscribe. The trailer will automatically display a card at the end of the video giving viewers an easy way to do just that.

9. Add sections to organize your channel — Sections are a great way to organize videos (by theme, style, series, genre, etc.) and give viewers an easy way to explore your content from the Home/Browse page. Sections can consist of videos, playlists, or channels, and can include your own videos as well as content uploaded by other YouTube users.

For most viewers, only your top section will be visible without scrolling — so make sure your most important videos are included in the section at the top of your channel page. Also, because sections can contain content from other channels, you have a great opportunity to cross-promote with other artists and curate an interesting viewing experience for your audience. To add a section, just click the “Add a Section” button from the bottom of your channel home page.

10. Customize your channel URL — YouTube.com/MyName is a lot easier to remember than YouTube.com/GigglyWiggly123CuzItWasMyEmailAddressBackIn2007, right?

11. Verify your YouTube channel — Go to http://www.youtube.com/account_features. If your account status has not already been verified, click “Verify” and select to verify by Voice Call or SMS.



HOW THE MONEY WORKS: YOUTUBE REVENUE FOR MUSICIANS

If you're distributing your music through [CD Baby](#), they can help you earn money from YouTube in several different ways. The details can be a bit confusing though, so let's clarify the distinctions.

Can you really make money from YouTube?

The short answer: Yes.

The longer answer: Serious money is being earned by artists who understand their audience, invest time in the YouTube platform, use it properly, and make great videos. Because the YouTube universe is vast (and free), it's up to you how much potential is here for your music, but YouTube ad money can be an important part of your increasingly diversified music revenue streams (along with ticket sales, [CDs and vinyl](#), [merch](#), [downloads](#), [streaming](#), [sync licensing](#), [publishing royalties](#), SoundExchange royalties, etc.).

Since YouTube monetization is included with CD Baby distribution, why not set yourself up to collect what's yours and be ready for when a song or album catches on? **Some CD Baby artists are earning tens of thousands every quarter from YouTube alone.**

The various avenues for driving revenue from YouTube activity

1. Collecting ad revenue through Content ID

Let's be honest: most people on YouTube are not paying to legally license the music they use in their videos. That's where Content ID comes in!

Through their [YouTube Monetization Program](#), CD Baby will make sure YouTube takes an audio fingerprint of your songs using the Content ID system, and properly identifies every instance of your music across all of YouTube — not just official music videos you've uploaded to your own channel, but also videos uploaded by other people (known as user-generated content, or "UGC").

When YouTube finds ANY instance of your music on their free platform, they will serve up advertisements on those videos. Any time advertising revenue is generated from an ad placed on a video containing your music, you earn a share.

Granted, payment from a single ad click or ad view won't be much to shout about, but in the modern music industry, what your fans do (and want to do) with your music has real value.



What's the deal with "includes copyrighted content" warnings?

If you see an "includes copyrighted content" notice on a video you've uploaded to your own channel, that means YouTube's Content ID system has identified some element within the video (the song, the recording, or the video) that is being monetized by someone else. If you're monetizing your music on YouTube through CD Baby, you will see these warnings on your own videos — which can be a bit confusing at first — because CD Baby is claiming the right to collect ad revenue on your behalf. In this case, you know that Content ID is working properly since YouTube has identified CD Baby as the authorized party administering your rights.

Cumulatively, ad revenue through Content ID can add up, especially when you consider that these earnings are possible in perpetuity.

Rather than the one big moment, it's about volume over time.

[Want to know more about how and when ads are selected for display on your videos? Check out "[How monetization works on YouTube.](#)"]

How can you generate more advertising revenue on YouTube? Try a few of these techniques to encourage your fans to create video content using your music:

* **Make sure your fans know they can use your songs** for their wedding videos, family reunion videos, company or school projects, vacation slideshows, etc. BUT, it's also important to educate your fans about this process. If they DO use your music, they will see an "includes copyrighted content" warning on the related video. If that person files a dispute, no one will be getting paid ad revenue until the issue is settled. So make sure they know to just leave things be when they see a copyright notice.

* **Host a video contest and ask your fans to create music videos.** It doesn't have to be a big-budget production: It could be footage of a dance party, a stop-motion animation, a bunch of kids lip-syncing, or a lyric video.

* **Create and upload videos for ALL your songs** (even if they're just simple [album art videos](#) — what YouTube calls "Art Tracks").

* **Sign up your entire back catalog** for CD Baby's YouTube Monetization program, because you never know which of your songs might be perfect for a content producer's needs. Even your oldest songs can keep working for you long-term.

2. YouTube Music

YouTube has a subscription streaming service called [YouTube Red](#), which lets subscribers watch videos and listen to music (including full albums in high-quality audio) ad-free — even when offline — for \$9.99/month. **As a CD Baby artist, if you're distributing your music to streaming services such as Apple Music and Spotify, they will deliver "Art Tracks" of your music to YouTube automatically as part of your distribution package.**

These Art Track videos are available NOT ONLY to YouTube Red subscribers, but also as ad-supported content accessible to EVERYONE on YouTube.



3. Publishing revenue

If you're a songwriter, you're owed additional publishing royalties whenever your music is streamed on YouTube. To collect these royalties, sign up with a publisher or publishing rights administrator such as [CD Baby Pro Publishing](#).

4. Join the Illustrated Sound Network

Illustrated Sound is a multi-channel network powered by CD Baby that helps artists make the most money from their music and videos on YouTube.



Once you're a member, Illustrated Sound's YouTube-certified team will audit your channel and videos regularly to make sure they're optimized for search and engagement, and fully monetized across all ad formats.

You can also work with Illustrated Sound to customize your content strategy, learn about the latest YouTube developments, and access a number of tools that will help you better manage your video presence across YouTube, Facebook, and more. [Apply to join Illustrated Sound today.](#)

5. Elbow grease

There are, of course, plenty of other ways to use YouTube to earn money. These include:

- Harnessing the power of your fan community through a service such as [Patreon](#).
- Using YouTube Cards, [End Screens](#), calls-to-action, and [video descriptions](#) to drive external sales or crowdfunding.
- And the most obvious of them all: crossing your fingers and hoping that exposure/activity/promotion means that if people enjoy your music and videos on YouTube, they'll be more likely to buy an album, sign up for your mailing list, or attend one of your concerts down the line.



THE IMPORTANCE OF WATCH TIME

Musicians really like to focus on view count. It's the metric they think matters most. BUT... there's something even more important than view count when it comes to YouTube's algorithm, which determines what videos get recommended to users: watch time!

Having 1,000 views on a video where each viewer on average watched four minutes is going to look a lot better to YouTube than having 10k views where the average viewer bounced after 30 seconds. The first of those two videos will have a great chance of organically reaching beyond your existing audience.

This speaks to the importance of creating quality videos that engage your viewers THE WHOLE TIME.

Why you should be scheduling your YouTube videos (and how to do it)

Creative people — especially musicians — don't always work well with deadlines. You might go for months without posting anything to YouTube, then inspiration strikes and you film three new videos in a single week. Of course you're itching to post them all in rapid succession, but it's probably smarter to hold back and put together a more deliberate plan.

Why is it important to post YouTube videos according to a schedule?

Subscribers are alerted every time you upload a video, drawing them back to your page to watch new and old content. So why not just publish videos whenever they're ready to go? What's the benefit of sticking to a schedule?

1. You don't overwhelm your subscribers

A new video needs time to announce itself to the world (through YouTube subscriber notifications, your email newsletter, social media updates, etc.). It takes time for your video to be noticed, watched, and shared.

If you post two or more videos around the same time, you're basically cannibalizing the reach and impact of your own content, diluting the power that any individual video might've otherwise possessed.

So, for instance, rather than publishing all your Art Track videos off your latest album at once, schedule them out over the course of a few weeks or months. Give each video (and song) its moment to shine.

2. You create anticipation

Popular YouTubers often talk about the anticipation their subscribers feel leading up to the posting of a new video. It's much easier to build that anticipation when your fans know **WHEN** they should be expecting something.

Again, it doesn't need to be every week. It could be every third Thursday of the month, or something along those lines — but setting the expectation goes a long way towards drawing your fans towards your new videos once they're online.

3. You set a challenge for yourself

Need to light a creative fire and boost your video output? Set a YouTube schedule and promise your subscribers you'll deliver!

Remember: not every video has to be a big-budget production. Your schedule can consist of — and account for — different types of content, including high-production videos, lyric videos, Art Tracks, vlogs, and more (each format requiring a different amount of time to shoot and edit).



4. You'll boost your ranking in YouTube search

According to an article by [3PlayMedia](#):

"Newly published videos get an SEO boost during the first week they're published on YouTube, so publishing regularly ensures you'll always have a video higher up in SERPs. Regular views and repeated visits to your channel signal to YouTube that your content is valuable, and therefore deserved higher search rank."

How to create your YouTube schedule

Well, first, be realistic. Do you have a day job? Are you on tour 11 months out of the year? You're probably not going to be able to pump out a video three times a week.

Factor in the time it takes you to adequately shoot, edit, share, and promote each video. Now figure how that time investment works with all your other responsibilities in life. Strike a balance so your YouTube goals are achievable. Otherwise you'll get burned out.

As for the frequency of posting, set a baseline goal of once a month — which should be easy enough to do if you include Art Tracks, snippets of live shows, etc. If you have the time, talent, or resources to publish videos more often, good for you. You totally should. Try twice a month and see how that goes. Adjust accordingly.

Next, figure out when your fans are most likely to interact with your videos; is it Thursday at 2pm? Probably. [Check out this chart with the best days and times to post new videos to YouTube.](#)

Also think about days when you consistently have free hours — because we all know that once you publish a video on YouTube it's followed up with more time on social media and email, sharing and promoting. Don't publish a video on a day when you're running from obligation to obligation.

Consider using a tool like Hootsuite (or some similar app) to schedule social media posts and manage responses. This type of tool will also give you further insight into when your audience is most engaged, and you can adjust your content schedule accordingly.

Okay, so you've got your content schedule worked out; you've optimized your channel; and you've monetized your music on YouTube. Now what?

It's time to go post some awesome videos!

Conclusion

YouTube is one of the most powerful outlets for promoting music. It can also be a fantastic platform to show your personality and creativity, limited only by the time, skill, and energy you put into it. Hopefully this guide gives you a good foundation to build upon. Once you're ready to take your YouTube channel and video efforts to the next level, [check out Illustrated Sound, the YouTube network powered by CD Baby.](#)

Happy video-making!

[Sign up for CD Baby's YouTube monetization program today.](#)