

sell it with MUSIC



By Greg Varhaug

Jingles Then and Now

In the old days, a 'jingle' was a song whose lyrics were designed to sell you a product. Today, the term 'jingle' is used to describe any music track used in a radio, TV, or Internet commercial. This also includes music for promotional videos, which might be much longer than a broadcast commercial.

You have two basic options for obtaining music. First, you can purchase the rights to pre-recorded music from a company that allows you to choose from a library of pieces. You can find these companies by searching on 'jingle music production.' You can listen to music samples online. Your second option is to contract an original composition as a 'work-for-hire.'

Your First Option: Licensing

For most people, licensing an existing piece is probably the best solution. This is especially true if you plan a short run or a limited distribution of your ad, if you don't have a large budget, or if the music isn't prominently featured in your ad, but is in the background for ambience.

Fees for licensed pieces usually start at around \$200 for between 30 seconds and one minute, though some companies charge considerably more. Also, longer pieces will be more expensive.

Many music production companies

offer a basically unlimited license. You can distribute as many copies as you want, in any medium you want, anywhere in the world with few or no restrictions. Some of these licenses have no expiration. Other licensing agreements are more complicated, and can include many restrictions. You need to be clear about the rights and restrictions in the licensing agreement, including the term of the agreement, if any.

With most companies the entire process can be handled online. After paying the fee for your music, you will be allowed to download it, usually as an MP3. Before purchasing a music track, be sure that the file format is compatible with your project, or that you have the means to convert it to a format that is compatible. You may have to check with your video production people to make sure there are no file compatibility issues.

If you're thinking of licensing an existing song by a popular artist, you can often purchase the recording and distribution rights from the Harry Fox Agency using their online service. But be aware that in order to use that piece in any kind of video presentation requires synchronization rights, and you may have to obtain mechanical rights as well. This option is obviously the most complex and the most expensive, and is best handled by an attorney or a company that specializes in obtaining clearances on music. Search on 'music license clearance.'

Your Second Option: Work-for-Hire

If your project requires a music track specifically tailored to fit your video, or if you need your music track to 'make a statement,' it may be necessary to contract an artist/producer. Contracting a 'work-for-hire' entitles you to effective ownership of the piece. So there are no restrictions on the number of copies you can distribute, and no limitations on how long you can run the piece; and you have no future obligations to the composer/producer.

If you produce a work-for-hire, you'll want to file a copyright for the music. On the copyright form, you can specify that the piece is a work-for-hire. You will have to include a CD copy of your music with your copyright registration, preferably without a voiceover track.

Music Production Then and Now

Not so long ago, creating an original music track meant hiring a composer and musicians, then buying time in a recording studio. In the past few years, this type of production has been replaced almost entirely with PC-based recording systems, including





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sequencing and loop-based recording. This means that you can contract only one person to create a completed music track. (This does not apply to vocals. If you want vocals, you still have to record a singer.)

This also means that it costs less and takes less time to produce a finished music track using modern methods than using traditional methods. And this means that music producers can offer better products, in greater variety, and cheaper than ever before.

Don't Try This at Home

One word of caution. You may decide, or someone may convince you that loop-based recording is easy, and that new software makes music creation possible for anyone who can operate a PC. This may be true to a degree, but this is not a job for anyone lacking experience.

Overseeing creative projects can be risky, especially if you have to deal directly with musicians and artists. So you should find one person with experience who can take the project from start to finish. These projects usually start at between \$300 and \$500 for between 30 seconds and one minute of finished recorded product. Again, prices can range up to several thousand dollars depending on whom you contract, and the length and complexity of your project.

There is intense competition among jingle producers, so you have some room for bargaining. At the same time, you want your producer to be enthusiastic about your project, so you probably shouldn't drive too hard a bargain. You should also always retain the right to reject the piece if the finished product fails to suit your needs.

If your video requires music or sound effects at specific times, you should provide a script to your music producer with the exact time for each effect listed. These times should not be approximations. If possible, determine the timing of each effect down to the frame (30th of a second).



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Music with Voiceovers

A few considerations apply whether you choose to license an existing piece, or produce an original piece. If you plan to include a voiceover, you may not want a predominant melody in your piece. The voiceover essentially takes the place of the melody, and a musical melody can draw attention away from your voiceover. A good rule of thumb is to have your finished music track at least 3dB (decibels) lower than your voiceover track.

It's a good idea to have your voiceover script in place. In fact, you may want to synch the voice track with your video footage before you produce the music track. To decide whether the music you're considering is right for your script, read the voiceover

script as you listen to the track.

If the track includes drums or percussion, you probably want a simple, understated beat. If your video uses any on-location sound, it may be a good idea to suspend the music track altogether in those sections, or to lower it significantly. Lower the level of the music in sections using on-location sound by at least 3dB, and 5-6 dB is probably better.

A quality music track can add real impact to your presentation. This is the reason that many high-dollar TV and radio ad campaigns rely so heavily on music. Music can play an important role in establishing a brand. Finding the right music, or the right person to produce your music, might require some time and effort, but it's worth it. By following a few simple guidelines, and avoiding a few common mistakes, you can effectively utilize the psychological power of music to push your presentation over the top. **N**

Greg Varhaug has worked professionally for over 20 years as a musician, arranger, teacher, and writer. He has scored and performed on radio and TV commercials, promotional videos, and short films, including a number of commercials for Congressman Charles Wilson (Charlie Wilson's War). More recently, Greg has contributed music to several short documentary films by independent filmmaker Erik Kolflat. These films include The Circuit featuring Billy Dee Williams, and a series of documentaries on the Houston Art Car Club and the Burning Man Festival. Greg operates HoustonGuitar.Com, a guitar-lesson website. He can be contacted at greg@houstonguitar.com.