



Journal of the  
Music & Entertainment Industry  
Educators Association

Volume 23, Number 1  
(2023)

Bruce Ronkin, Editor  
Northeastern University

Paul Linden, Associate Editor  
University of Southern Mississippi

Ben O'Hara, Associate Editor (Book Reviews)  
Australian Institute of Music

Published with Support  
from



# **Becoming an Award-Winning Country Musician: A Study of the Many Paths to Success**

Brianna Simon

*MBA, Nicholls State University*

Juliann Allen

*Nicholls State University*

En Mao

*Nicholls State University*

<https://doi.org/10.25101/23.4>

## **Abstract**

Country music artists aspiring to sign with a major record label, win a music award, or achieve other goals associated with success in the music industry may experience difficulties in getting noticed by industry leaders and potential fans. Are there certain paths that are more productive, faster, or better overall for artists? The current study examines sixty-three award-winning country music artists who found success within the twenty-first century and the various paths they followed to signing record deals and earning awards. The authors identified and grouped paths into thirteen categories, such as performing at bars and events, participating in a singing competition, and moving to Nashville. The results conclude through data visualization and regression analysis that while some paths propel artists to sign a record deal or release a debut album in the least amount of time, other paths are more profitable, sustainable, and productive. For example, the results show that most artists move to Nashville, release music, and sign publishing deals as part of their paths to success. Most artists begin their journeys playing in a band or participating in live performances, both of which lead to the longest music careers and highest net worth amounts. Moving to Nashville remains one of the fastest paths to get signed by a major record label. The results also suggest that a social media following positively influences net worth for artists. The research presents career development guidance for up-and-coming country music artists who wish to achieve greater brand awareness and gain support from music industry intermediaries.

Keywords: country music, career development, career success, career path, music awards, record deal, singing competition, Nashville, music industry, music artist

## Introduction

In the American country music industry, particular accolades for an artist signal the achievement of success. Winning an annual award from a prominent music academy, advancing to the final rounds of a televised singing competition, and signing a deal with a major record label are among milestones that an artist can accomplish on the journey to success. Given the plethora of media types and ways to become discovered by industry professionals, are some routes to noticeability and success more commonly taken, effective, and lucrative than others? The current study examines the paths to winning a prominent country music award, including the milestones an aspiring artist achieves and the various career development activities that an artist undertakes on the way to success.

## Background

Previous literature has examined the effect of various factors on artist success, such as radio play's positive influence on song and album sales, newly released album sales' positive influence on the sales of older albums by the same artist, and the correlation between YouTube music video views and record sales (Dewan and Ramaprasad 2014; Hendricks and Sorensen 2009; Kretschmer and Peukert 2018). Leenders et al. (2015) clustered Dutch artists into different groups based on the paths each artist followed, such as television exposure, CD recordings, and social media usage. The authors found that artists take a variety of routes to achieve greater exposure for their music and that working with a record label may be more lucrative for some artists over others (Leenders et al. 2015). One notable cluster, deemed the Emerging Star group, benefits from a combination of old and new media (e.g., television coverage and internet music streaming, respectively) (Leenders et al. 2015). Many of the artists in the Emerging Star cluster also work with a record label to a much higher extent than the other clusters (Leenders et al. 2015). The results reveal a connection between artists aiming to reach mainstream success and the use of both traditional and new approaches to do so (Leenders et al. 2015).

A study by Tompkins et al. (2021) focused solely on new media, most notably Spotify, as a way for independent folk artists to gain exposure on a global scale. Among the eleven indie folk artists studied, 57 percent of the artists' streams stem from songs on Spotify playlists (Tompkins et al. 2021). Songs with a higher track popularity can catch the attention of Spotify curators who create editorial playlists, exposing independent artists to even higher listenership (Tompkins et al. 2021). Playlists increase the likelihood that listeners who prefer a specific music genre will hear and discover artists from their favored music categories, providing artists with an easier way to reach their target markets compared to using more broadcasted methods (Spotify for Artists 2019; Tompkins et al. 2021).

The aforementioned studies allude to a possible shift in the way artists gain further exposure for their music and gain the attention of industry professionals due to the rise of digital media. Despite the advantages of digital media, Everts et al. (2022) found that connecting with industry intermediaries to achieve long-term success remains a frequently traversed route among artists. Through twenty-one interviews of Dutch artists who performed at a music showcase festival, the authors learned that all of the artists plan to depend upon music industry intermediaries such as media companies, managers, and venues to achieve goals (Everts et al. 2022). As a way to get noticed by intermediaries, the artists develop a positive reputation through what they call milestones, such as releasing a single or playing a performance (Everts et al. 2022). Some artists liken achieving milestones to collecting currency or points, whereas the more milestones one achieves, the greater the career growth they experience (Everts et al. 2022). The artists also recognize the supplemental value provided by promotional tactics on social media platforms and listenership on Spotify, arguing that the tactics did not completely replace the value of working with intermediaries (Everts et al. 2022). Zawaan and ter Bogt (2009) interviewed music industry executives to gain insight into the way the professionals evaluate artists before signing a deal with them. The professionals identify the following traits typically present in successful artists: charisma, motivation, self-criticism, and the willingness to work hard (Zawaan and ter Bogt 2009). The professionals also mention the high frequency of connecting with artists through networking and further evaluating the artists through demos (Zawaan and ter Bogt 2009).

The current study aims to quantitatively build on the previously mentioned findings to examine the most commonly taken paths artists follow

to achieve success in the twenty-first century. One can define success for artists from many different angles, such as by overall profitability, record sales, recognition by other artists, and performance frequency (Zawaan and ter Bogt 2009). The current study defines and operationalizes *success* as winning at least one award bestowed by music academies and trade associations such as the Country Music Association Entertainer of the Year award, the Academy of Country Music Female Vocalist of the Year award, and many others. The research focuses on the paths of artists in the American country music industry. Country music maintains a promising position, especially as recent trends signal country music's strengthening popularity among younger generations. Generation Z and Millennials compose half of the listenership for country artists like Morgan Wallen, Luke Combs, and Zach Bryan (Garcia 2023). The 2023 Academy of Country Music Awards saw a viewership increase of 87% from 2022 (Grein 2023). Additionally, in 2022, the country music genre composed 8.9% of digital album sales and 12.4% of digital song sales (Luminate 2022). The country music industry, like other music genres, bears its own connections, cultural hubs, and rituals that give rise to a unique way of showcasing oneself and performing to gain popularity. For instance, Nashville, Tennessee has long served as an epicenter of country music and carries the reputation as an important part of the city's unique positioning (*Rolling Stone*, n.d.). An up-and-coming country music artist may experience varying levels of progress based on the specific paths one follows, such as moving to Nashville. By examining the career paths of sixty-three country music artists, the current study aims to answer the following three key research questions:

RQ1: What are the distinct paths to success taken by country music artists?

RQ2: What is the "best" path to success with regard to efficiency, speed, profitability, sustainability, and productivity?

RQ3: Does a social media following have a stronger positive impact on a country music artist's net worth relative to total albums produced and career productivity overall?

To date, while other studies examine the way in which artists achieve success in the music industry overall and within some specific genres, very few studies have examined artists' paths to success in the country music industry. Theoretically, the research builds on the work of Everts et al. (2022) to show that getting the attention of industry intermediaries and following a "traditional" path as an artist remains relevant in the current time and applies to the country music industry in the United States. The research provides scholars with additional evidence regarding the most effective ways to predict artist success and contributes to previous literature by extending the study of artist career paths to a specific genre. Managerially, the results show the most lucrative path for aspiring country music artists, proposing practical milestones and steps to achieve one's career success. The work also serves as a guide for music educators in mentoring students who wish to follow similar career paths. The study presents an original contribution to the music marketing industry by distinguishing different paths taken by country music artists and presenting evidence for why particular paths hold a high likelihood of yielding positive investments based on an artist's individual goals.

## Methodology

In order to derive the most productive or fastest path for an artist, data was compiled on a group of twenty-first-century country singers. The study examined the journeys of solo country musicians who are deemed successful. Success, as previously defined, was operationalized by earning a country music award. The sixty-three artists used in the data were chosen based on the criterion of having received at least one award in the following fifteen major award categories from 2000 to 2023:

- Billboard Top Country Artist
- Billboard Female Top Country Artist
- Billboard Male Top Country Artist
- Billboard Top New Country Artist
- Country Music Association (CMA) Entertainer of the Year
- CMA Female Vocalist of the Year
- CMA Male Vocalist of the Year
- CMA New Artist of the Year
- Academy of Country Music (ACM) Female Vocalist of the Year
- ACM Male Vocalist of the Year
- ACM New Female Vocalist of the Year
- ACM New Male Vocalist of the Year

- Grammys' Best Country Solo Performance
- Grammys' Best Female Country Vocal Performance
- Grammys' Best Male Country Vocal Performance

All of these awards that define success are based on the artists' vocal skill, performance, and prominence in the country music genre. Furthermore, considering the top artist accolades awarded by different organizations provides a wider perspective on artists' accomplishments. For example, pulling from *Billboard* focuses on what the fans think of the artist while pulling from the Academy of Country Music, The Grammys, and The Country Music Association provides insight from industry leaders.

A partial thematic analysis and quantitative assessment was conducted by examining biographies, which include Wikipedia, Chartmetric, AllMusic, and Biography.com, and various news articles of each artist, and gathering information on age, gender, cumulative awards won (based on the awards listed above), the paths they took to gain exposure, the most dominant path, their first record label, the date of the record deal, their age when they received the deal, the artist's current record label and its parent company, net worth, total albums from AllMusic discography, followers from these social media platforms: Spotify, YouTube, TikTok, Instagram, SoundCloud, Facebook, and Twitter, and if the artist was accepted or rejected by the singing competitions *American Idol*, *The Voice*, *Nashville Star*, and others. Additional data were collected from Chartmetric in 2023, which include the platform's assessment for the artist's career stage. The thematic analysis helped in creating categories or themes based upon which paths the artist took to achieve success. Descriptive coding was used to consolidate the paths. The authors discussed interpretive discrepancies among the group and reached 100 percent agreement on all path categories. A complete list of the sources can be found in the Appendix: Artist Data References.

The awards we investigated were ones presented from the year 2000 to 2023. Artists who were over the age of sixty and only received one award in the twenty-first century were removed from the sample, as the artists do not represent twenty-first-century strategies and paths. The removed artists achieved success during a time in which the factors in the external environment differed greatly from those in the last twenty years, and they were not dominant artists in the twenty-first century. The sample retained artists who were over sixty years of age but received more than one award, as the artists are still dominant in the twenty-first century, as

evidenced by their ability to receive more than one award. The sample retained artists who received one award but were younger than sixty years of age, as the artists represent aspiring musicians who want to gain exposure. Therefore, their paths and strategies are relevant to the study.

## Analysis and Results

The authors analyzed the data using the approaches of data visualization and regression analysis. Tableau was utilized to visualize the data. The final sample contained sixty-three country music artists with an average age of 43.5 years. Sixty-five percent of the sample identified as male, 5% of the sample identified as African American, and 95% of the sample identified as White. According to Chartmetric’s assessment for the artist’s career stage, our sample included all five stages of artists: 2 in legendary status, 26 superstar, 26 mainstream, 6 mid-level, and 3 developing. The authors found 189 distinct paths, or actions taken (e.g., competing in a singing competition, performing in a band), by an artist. The authors coded each path into thirteen path categories, defined in Table 1.

The descriptions of the path categories are provided as well. Some categories include multiple similar activities, for example, “Released Music/Record” is used to group self-released single, self-released album, self-released EP, regional label album release, demo, etc. Some path categories are more specific in nature than others. “Networking Connection” and “Record Label Internship” both involve artists connecting with individuals in the music industry, but the paths differ in that the latter focuses on connections made specifically through holding a job position while the former encompasses a variety of ways in which one could make a connection (e.g., in a casual conversation, at an event, etc.). These categories were developed iteratively. First, the assessment of the path was conducted by two separate coders. The paths were coded using terms closely represented in the biographical documents. Discrepancies between the coders were discussed with collaboration of the third coder. The initial round of coding resulted in sixty-one unique paths. Then, three coders iteratively condensed the number of paths by categories down to the final thirteen.

Path Category		Path Description
1	Moved to Nashville	The artists who took this path decided to move to Nashville in order to pursue music. This path was made evident when researching the artist biographies.



Path Category		Path Description																		
2	Released Music/Record	<p>This path consists of any type of released music or recording that is documented in their biography. This may include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>recording, self-released single</li> <li>self-released album</li> <li>self-released EP</li> <li>regional label album release</li> <li>demo</li> <li>independently-released CD</li> <li>independently-released single</li> <li>privately recorded CD</li> <li>released a duet single</li> </ul>																		
3	Publishing Deal	The artists who took this path signed a publishing deal with a major or independent publisher.																		
4	Band	<p>The artists who took this path established a band and performed in clubs, bars, local events, etc. Some artists toured with their band across the country while others stayed in college towns. The main distinction between the band and performance paths is from the distinctions made in the research biographies of the artists. The research presented that the artist joined an already formed band or created a band rather than solely pursuing an individual career with musicians who backed up the artist. The entire band was the focus rather than the artist. For example, the band had a name rather than just the name of the artist. If the research did not provide band names, but mentioned that the artist “formed a band” or “joined a band,” the artist was considered to have taken the band path.</p>																		
5	Performance	<p>This path consists of any type of musical performance by the artist not including a band. If the focus of the performance was on the individual artist rather than the musicians performing with the artist, it falls into this category.</p> <p>They may include performing at:</p> <table border="0"> <tr> <td>bars</td> <td>clubs</td> <td>local events</td> </tr> <tr> <td>church</td> <td>talent shows</td> <td>self-tours</td> </tr> <tr> <td>gigs</td> <td>parties</td> <td>resorts</td> </tr> <tr> <td>jamborees</td> <td>Dollywood</td> <td>cafes</td> </tr> <tr> <td>showcases</td> <td>Grand Ole Opry</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>openings for another artist</td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> </table>	bars	clubs	local events	church	talent shows	self-tours	gigs	parties	resorts	jamborees	Dollywood	cafes	showcases	Grand Ole Opry		openings for another artist		
bars	clubs	local events																		
church	talent shows	self-tours																		
gigs	parties	resorts																		
jamborees	Dollywood	cafes																		
showcases	Grand Ole Opry																			
openings for another artist																				

Path Category		Path Description
6	Networking Connection	The artists who took this path made a networking connection by meeting someone who connected them with an industry professional. The path was classified as a networking connection especially when it was a spontaneous connection, a connection through people they knew, or a connection through a band that helped them meet those in the industry. It was not tied to a hired job position or a deal/contract with a label. While other artists may have made networking connections, the research did not distinguish that contribution.
7	Singing Competition	The artists who took this path tried out for a singing competition. Some artists were accepted into the competitions (and some of those artists won) while others were rejected. The path was attempted by the artist, so it is considered a path. The singing competitions included are: <i>American Idol</i> <i>The Voice</i> <i>Nashville Star</i> <i>Gimme the Mic</i>
8	Artist Development Deal	The artists who took this path signed an artist development deal or professional development deal with a major or independent label.
9	Acting/ Dancing	The artists who took this path had prior exposure through an acting or dancing career.
10	Songwriting	The artists who took this path decided to pursue songwriting, sign a songwriting contract, sign a songwriter development deal, or pursue a songwriting partnership (with another artist).
11	Moved to Los Angeles	The artists who took this path decided to move to Los Angeles in order to pursue music. This path was made evident when researching the artist biographies.
12	Record Label Internship	The artists who took this path got a record label internship in order to establish connections in the field. While this may also be considered a type of networking connection, it was separated from that category in order to provide more detail.
13	YouTube	The artists who took this path had music that went viral on the YouTube platform. While other artists may have had their music on the platform as well, the research did not distinguish that contribution.

Table 1. Major path categories.

Four artists in the sample took only one path. Overall, an artist takes three paths on average. Artists who take more than two paths spend about six years on the first path. Artists who take more than three paths spend about 2.4 years on the second path. Artists who take more than four paths spend 1.9 years on the third path. This analysis indicates that artists spend more time in earlier paths. Figure 1 represents the flow of multiple paths leading to career milestones of signing a record deal with a major record label and releasing a debut album. Regardless of the number or order of the paths taken, the combination of the paths lead to the two milestones for each artist in the sample.

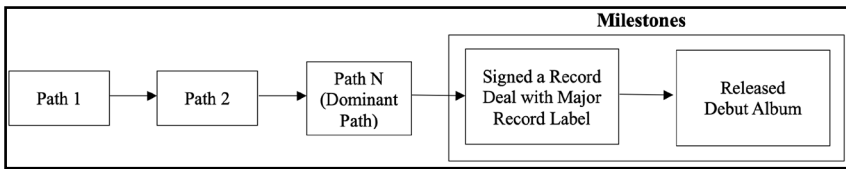


Figure 1. Artists' paths and milestones.

The five dark bars in Figure 2 represent the top five most frequently taken paths, taken by more than 40 percent of the artists. The names of the paths are listed to the left side of the figure. The length of the bar represents the number of artists in our sample who took that path, and the actual number of artists is labeled to the right side of the bar. A single artist is only counted once for one path or bar, although a single artist can be represented more than once within the figure since they may have pursued more than one path to obtain their success. Among the thirteen categories, “Moved to Nashville” displays the highest frequency, with 65% of the artists moving to Nashville at some point in their careers. The authors then examined the *dominant path*, or the path that immediately preceded an artist’s first signing with a major record label (Figure 3). A single artist is only counted once in this figure. The most frequent dominant paths comprises ten out of the thirteen total path categories, with “Released Music/Record” being the most frequent dominant path (21% of all artists). “Moved to Nashville,” the most commonly taken path, is the third most frequent dominant path. “Artist Development Deal,” “Record Label Internship,” and “YouTube” paths are not among the dominant paths. Only two artists took the YouTube path. One of the artists, Zach Bryan, has not signed a

record deal with a major record label. Therefore, the authors excluded the artist from further analyses.

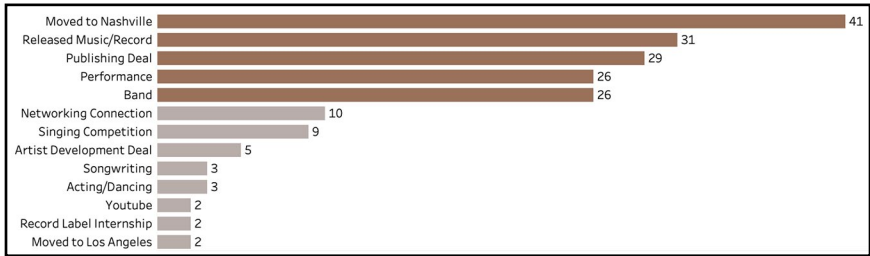


Figure 2. Paths most commonly taken by artists.

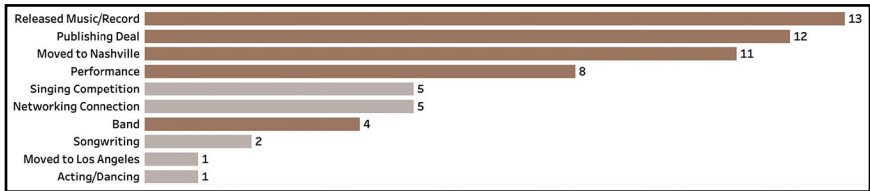


Figure 3. Dominant paths (paths preceding signing first major record label).

Next, the authors examined the first paths most frequently taken by the artists (Figure 4). A single artist is only counted once in this figure. A first path signifies the beginning of an artist’s career. “Band” claims the top spot as the most frequently taken first path, with “Performance” and “Moved to Nashville” being the second and third most frequent paths, respectively. “Band” and “Performance” differ in that the former denotes that an artist joined or created and performed with a band, and the latter includes any performance (e.g., performing at bars, talent shows) other than a performance from a band. Overall, 73 percent of artists took one of the top four paths as his or her first path. The most frequent first paths reflect only eight of the thirteen path categories. For instance, “Publishing Deal” is the third most commonly taken path, but it is not among the most frequent first paths.

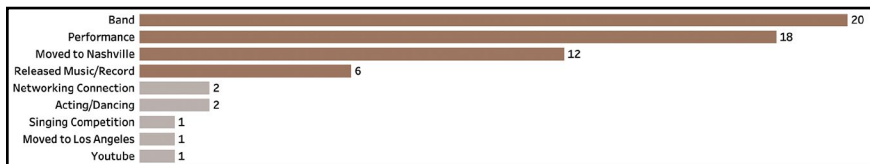


Figure 4. First paths.

The artist selection criteria for the research are awards; therefore, the highest numbers of awards were used to approximate the “best” paths. Figure 5 displays the average awards earned by each artist based on the first paths taken. “Performance” represents the best first path if an artist aims to receive a high number of country music awards. “Band” marks the second most awarded path, and “Moved to Nashville” yields the third highest average number of awards. In addition, the authors tested the differences in awards between the “Performance” path and the other top three paths. The “Performance” path results in a significantly higher number of awards than the paths of “Band” ( $p < 0.05$ ), “Moved to Nashville” ( $p < 0.05$ ), and “Release Music/Record” ( $p < 0.05$ ). Other comparisons were not conducted due to small sample sizes.

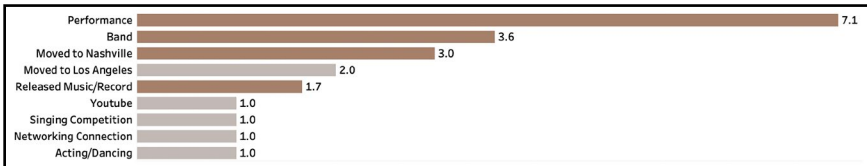


Figure 5. Best paths—average awards for paths.

In analyzing the fastest path to signing with a major record label, the authors used the first identifiable path in an artist’s career. The average number of years taken to get signed by a major record label indicates the length of the path. In other words, the shorter the length, the faster the path. Figure 6 shows the three most commonly taken paths highlighted in a darker shade. For each path, the average number of years taken to get signed by a major record label are listed to the right side of the bar. “Singing Competition” includes trying out and competing on a singing competition show (e.g., *American Idol*, *The Voice*) and represents the fastest path. “Performance,” the most commonly taken as well as the best path identified earlier, takes the longest (15.1 years) to get signed. “Band” takes an average of 10.1 years, and “Moved to Nashville” takes 6.1 years. It appears the best paths are inversely related to the speed to get signed by a major record label.

Once signed by a record label, artists take about 1.2 years on average to release a debut album. The shortest time again is the “Singing Competition” path, as it is contractually mandated to release the album for the winner. Figure 7 shows that the “Performance” path artists (1.28 years) release debut albums faster than artists on the “Band” (1.4 years) and “Moved

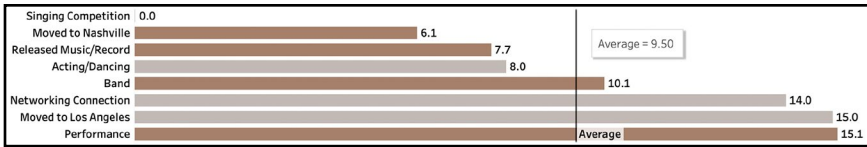


Figure 6. Fastest paths (beginning of career to signed by a major label).

to Nashville” paths (2.08 years). The finding reveals the importance of performance, which develops the foundation of an artist’s career. Through performance and playing music in a band in front of a live audience, an artist receives constant feedback from the audience and critics. The process presents opportunities for the artist to consistently refine and improve based on both negative and positive criticisms. The grit develops naturally through this process. Similarly, the process of creating and refining an album requires such character and persistence. Therefore, an artist who has been performing for years will have the skills and readiness to release an album relatively quickly.

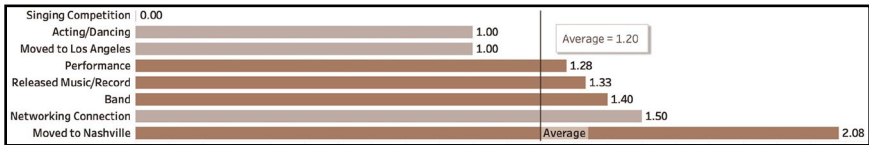


Figure 7. Fastest path (from signed by a major label to released first record).

The authors used the net worth of an artist to represent a path’s profitability. Figure 8 displays the most profitable paths of “Performance” and “Band,” with average net worth of over \$106 million and nearly \$83 million, respectively. The average net worth was about \$23.68 million. All other paths result in lower lucrativeness when comparing average net worth, which again enforces the relevance of an artist being equipped with performing experience. On average, artists who moved to Nashville to begin their careers amassed about a \$6.5 million net worth.

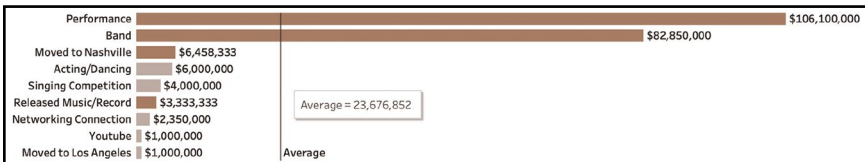


Figure 8. Average net worth for paths.

The artists in the sample vary by age, which means that some artists have had a longer period of time in their lives to be productive in music. To account for the difference in productive years across the sample, the authors measured the average net worth by dividing by the length of each artist’s productive career (the productive career starts from when an artist was first signed by a major record label). The calculation allows for a fairer comparison of the paths by comparing the net worth accumulation on a yearly basis. The same three paths (displayed in Figure 9) prevail as the most profitable: “Performance,” “Band,” and “Moved to Nashville.” “Performance,” which yields a yearly average net worth of nearly \$4.4 million, is followed by “Band” with over \$2.8 million. The average yearly net worth reaches almost \$1.2 million. “Moved to Nashville” and “Release Music/Record” both hover around a half-a-million dollar annual net worth. In addition, the authors found that the net worth of “Performance” significantly exceeds “Moved to Nashville” ( $p < 0.05$ ). Similarly, the “Performance” net worth is significantly higher than “Released Music/Record” ( $p < 0.05$ ). The small sample sizes of other paths disallowed an appropriate test for differences.

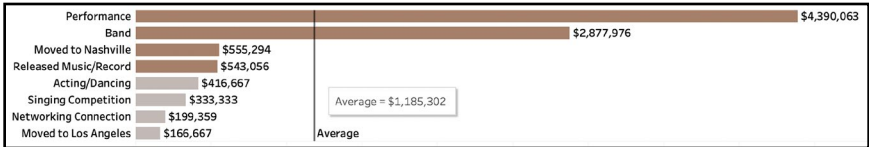


Figure 9. Average net worth by career length for paths.

To assess the sustainability and productivity of each path, the authors first compared the career length of the paths. The most sustainable “Band” path shows the longest career with just over 23 years on average. “Performance” shows a duration of almost 20 years, and “Networking Connection” marks the third most sustainable with 17.5 years. “Moved to Nashville” claims the fourth spot with about 14 years, which is also the overall average career length in the study. The most sustainable paths—“Band” and “Performance”—show that having strong networking circles can boost an artist’s career. Figure 10 displays the average career length for paths.

The authors also examined the productivity, or the average number of albums of the artists by path, displayed in Figure 11. Again, “Band” and “Performance” result in the most productive career paths, as artists taking

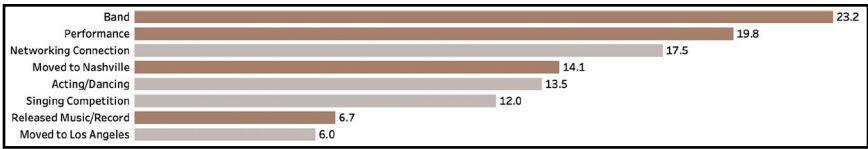


Figure 10. Average career length for paths in years.

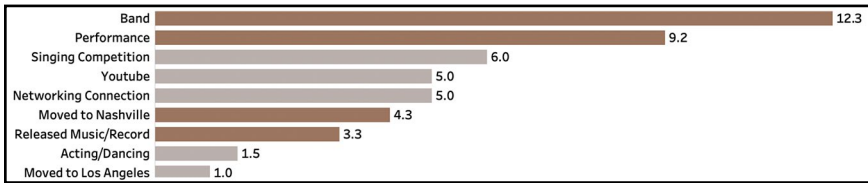


Figure 11. Average albums.

the paths produced the most albums. Specifically, the “Band” path yields an average of 12.3 albums and the “Performance” path yields an average of 9.2 albums. Overall, artists produce an average 5.3 albums.

Only two artists in the dataset were categorized as starting their journeys on social media. However, it is unarguable that to stay relevant in today’s music industry, artists need to be active on social platforms. Therefore, to assess the role of social media in a country music artist’s success, the authors conducted a regression analysis to assess the influence of social media followers, along with total albums and career productivity (the productivity of a given artist between the signing with the first record label to the present time), on an artist’s net worth. The authors collected the number of subscribers on YouTube and followers on Spotify, TikTok, Instagram, SoundCloud, Facebook, and Twitter before analyzing the influence of the number of followers on each type of social media platform on an artist’s net worth. The number of Facebook followers provides the highest explanatory power (32% of the variance) for net worth among all social platforms. The model in Figure 12 explains 60% of the variance in net worth, with all three variables—Facebook followers, total albums, and productive career—positively influencing net worth.

The research provides compelling evidence that “old school” paths such as “Performance” and “Band” have continued to be viable in the last two decades. The paths, although time-consuming, provide the environment and time artists need to develop and hone their craft. However, there are also young artists like Zach Bryan who started his career on YouTube and earned the ACM Award for New Male Artist of the Year in 2023. Does



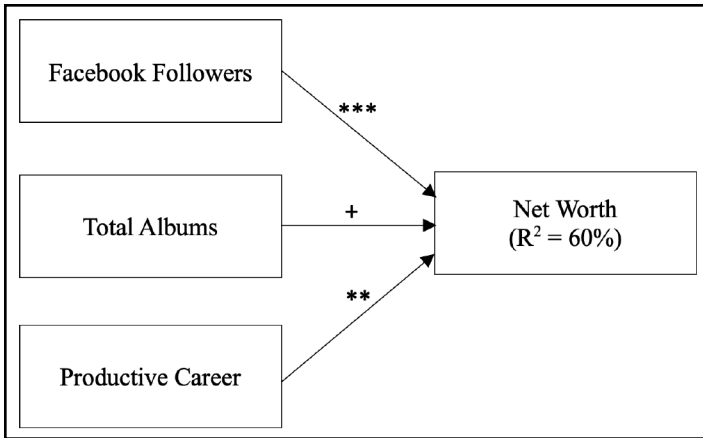


Figure 12. Regression model—factors influence net worth.

the data signal an emergence of a new order? While social media platforms have not marked the start of a career for most of the award-winning country music artists, platform use by younger artists as attempted “shortcuts” remains inevitable. The research indicates that while an artist may find it easy to start on YouTube, the artist also has to put in the work needed to develop oneself and perform in front of audiences. On the other hand, the research also highlights the importance of developing social media followings, as they can impact an artist’s net worth.

## Discussion

In the current study, the authors aimed to explore the relationships between the paths taken by country music artists and the subsequent milestones of success, notably the achievement of at least one widely recognized award in the music industry. After collecting data on the demographics, awards, career paths, and social media performance of sixty-three twenty-first-century country music artists, the authors sought to answer three main research questions.

RQ1: What are the distinct paths to success taken by country music artists?

A *path* was defined as a major action or occurrence in an artist’s life that contributed to advancing one’s country music career, and success was operationalized as winning a country music award. The authors examined

the journey of each artist in the sample, beginning with the first path taken and ending with the reception of a country music award. The authors coded the paths into the thirteen distinct path categories defined in Table 1. Each artist took at least one of the paths during his or her lifetime, and most artists took more than one of the paths.

The results show that not all paths are taken in an established order. For example, artist Toby Keith originally performed with a band before moving to Nashville to launch his solo career. Keith distributed his music by playing gigs at night and performing on the streets during the day while handing out copies of his demo (Lamare 2018). Keith provided a copy of the demo to a flight attendant on the night he was going to quit (Lamare 2018). Coincidentally, the flight attendant knew a record executive at Mercury Records, which created a valuable connection to boost Keith's career. Carrie Underwood, another well-known country music artist, performed in church, plays, and talent shows throughout her youth before competing on the show *American Idol* (Ray 2022). Overall, while particular paths seem to increase an artist's likelihood for signing with a record label and winning a country music award, paths can be taken in various orders and combinations. An important message from analyzing this research question is that artists must be aware that multiple paths are perhaps mandatory to shape the success of an artist. Not gaining success from one path should not deter artists from their dreams. Persistent efforts over many paths over many years is typical for award winning artists.

RQ2: What is the “best” path to success with regard to efficiency, speed, profitability, sustainability, and productivity?

Upon suggesting that a country music artist can follow one of many paths as opposed to one “right” path, the study also shows that an artist's chosen path may differ based on the value one seeks. With further data visualization, the results reiterate Nashville's standing as the “Music City,” with most of the artists in the sample moving to the city at some point before getting signed to a record label (*The Tennessean* 2019). Many influential entities related to the country music industry and culture, such as the Grand Ole Opry, Music Row, the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum, and a slew of country music bars, call Nashville home (Nashville Music City, n.d.; *The Tennessean* 2019). Given the connection to country

music and the anticipated industry network an artist has the opportunity to experience in the city, one could argue that the popularity of moving to Nashville to pursue success is expected.

The most dominant paths, or the paths preceding an artist's signing with a record label, equate to releasing music and undergoing a publishing deal. Industry professionals may view the release of music as an indicator of an artist's determination, recording experience, and capability of creating a final product. While some aspects of publishing deals remain similar to record deals, such as working alongside a record label to promote one's music, publishing deals allow artists to relinquish the copyright to the musical works they record and receive assistance from a record label with regard to promoting the songs and gaining more airplay (Roland, n.d.). One could argue that both releasing music and carrying out a publishing deal involve elements that make signing a record deal a natural next step. For example, Maren Morris tried out for *The Voice* and *American Idol*. After rejected from both competitions, Morris self-released an eponymous EP on Spotify in 2015 (Editors 2021). Morris continued to use the music streaming service to disseminate her music to her fans, potential fans, and industry executives (Editors 2021). Morris' EP led to Columbia Nashville, part of Sony Music Nashville, offering her a record deal (Editors 2021).

The most common first paths of "Band" and "Performance" reflect an artist's efforts to promote one's singing and reach greater brand awareness in front of an audience when getting started. "Performance" and "Band" also lead to earning the highest average number of awards per artist, which aligns with the criterion of quality vocal performance for many of the awards featured in the study.

Interestingly, competing in a singing competition aligns with the highest speed to getting signed by a record label, perhaps due to competitions' highly broadcasted nature, appeal to a wide variety of viewers, and structure of amenities for top contestants. For example, *American Idol* and other singing competitions such as *The Voice* award a record deal to the winning contestant, contributing to a singing competition as the speediest path to achieving milestones (Spencer 2021; *The U.S. Sun* 2022). Once signed by a record label, artists who take the "Performance" path experience one of the shortest time durations out of all of the paths before releasing a debut album. Though moving to Nashville and singing in a band render lucrative results by other measures, performing enables an artist to

continue to refine singing skills and the ability to connect with the audience.

The paths of “Band” and “Performance” show further advantages when evaluated for profitability, sustainability, and productivity. The two paths consistently relate to achieving a high net worth, experiencing a long career, and producing the most albums. The results paint a scene of the striving artist who performs in bars and at events, interacting with the audience, and creating a memorable experience for listeners. Performing and playing in bands helps an artist to increase exposure, promote brand awareness, and build a fan base, which will hopefully lead to signing a record deal and winning a country music award.

RQ3: Does a social media following have a stronger positive impact on a country music artist’s net worth relative to total albums produced and career productivity overall?

To address the final research question, a regression analysis of social media followers on net worth revealed a powerful influence from Facebook follower quantities. A strong social media following positively contributes most to an artist’s net worth, surpassing the influence of an artist’s total number of albums and overall career productivity (i.e., the length of time from signing with a major record label to the present). Social media currently stands as one of the most prolific ways to gather a following, spread information, and interact with fans. For instance, Luke Combs used social media in his early career, posting YouTube videos of himself playing. Although the social media exposure failed to result in a record deal, the exposure enabled Combs to build a fan base before moving to Nashville (Dineen, n.d.). Taylor Swift, another well-known country music artist, uses Facebook to promote herself through project updates, articles, and blogs. Additionally, she establishes a connection with her fans and contributes to her brand image via Twitter (Azyan, n.d.). While the results show that Facebook follower quantity most significantly influences an artist’s net worth compared to the number of albums produced and overall career productivity, results in the study also provide support for more “traditional” paths, such as moving to Nashville and performing live. In the current time, artists would do well to pursue both traditional paths and maintain an active social media presence.

## Conclusion and Future Research

The research findings managerially and theoretically contribute in several ways. First, the study builds on previous literature by exploring music artist career paths in the country music genre and proposing data-driven solutions for artists aiming to achieve specific goals and career success. Qualitative interviews in studies such as Everts et al. (2022) set a foundation by discussing artist characteristics and tactics aligned with career success. The current study extends the academic literature by showing specific tactics and paths that help artists achieve milestones, like signing a record deal and winning an award, based on a sample of artists who have already achieved such milestones. The data points analyzed were gathered from a vast multitude of sources and combined to produce a detailed set of career paths for sixty-three country music artists. Scholars can expand upon the dataset to conduct future research analyses that examine other aspects of country music artist careers.

From a theoretical standpoint, the research findings show that though social media tactics can positively boost an artist's journey to success, paths seen as more "traditional" in nature, such as performing at live gigs and releasing independent albums, remain the primary drivers of artist milestone achievement. Our study makes a significant contribution to the literature and understanding of career development and success of country music artists. The findings of our study can also be relevant to professionals who develop and market artists in the music industry, as well as to educators who play an important role in the growth and guidance of their students. It's important to identify artists who have spent adequate time honing their craft. Talent managers and music labels need to provide realistic guidance to young talent and provide insights from this study to encourage a steady stream of development activities.

Future research could further explore the role of social media in one's path to success. Of consumers aged 18 to 24 years, 45% rely on TikTok for music discovery (News Team 2023). Even more, 67% of TikTok users will likely look up a song via a streaming service after hearing the song featured on a TikTok post (Whateley 2023). The nature of the current study could also be expanded to other genres such as hip-hop. Alternative definitions of success could be employed to study, for example, independent musicians. Even more, future studies could explore whether different markers of success are most beneficial at certain periods in one's music career. Additional research could also consider the lifestyle deci-

sions musicians make, as well as the struggles they undergo, to support themselves and maintain a sustainable source of income in the live gig economy. Lastly, artist paths in country music could be examined from a gender standpoint to observe differences and the ways in which one's gender may advantage or disadvantage working toward success. Watson (2019) revealed inequitable gender representation in the country music genre, shown by trends such as the outperformance of females by male country music artists with various chart performance measures. A comparison of the paths of male and female country music artists, as well as other factors like ethnicity, could be further explored in the future to spot and provide insight into inequities in the industry.

## References

---

- ACM. 2021. "57th ACM Awards & Voting Criteria And Policy." *Academy of Country Music*, October 18, 2021. <https://www.acmcountry.com/voting-policy#awards-criteria>.
- Azyan, Liz. n.d. "How to Build a Social Media Following Like Taylor Swift." *Liz Azyan*. <https://lizazyan.com/build-social-media-following-like-taylor-swift/>.
- Billboard*. 2022. "Year-end Charts: Top Country Artists" <https://www.billboard.com/charts/year-end/2020/top-country-artists/>.
- Dewan, Sanjeev, and Jui Ramaprasad. 2014. "Social Media, Traditional Media, and Music Sales." *MIS Quarterly* 38, no. 1: 101-122. <https://doi.org/10.25300/MISQ/2014/38.1.05>.
- Dineen, Annie. n.d. "Interview: Meet Luke Combs, a regular guy with exceptional talent." *The Shotgun Seat*. <https://theshotgunseat.com/interview-meet-luke-combs-a-regular-guy-with-exceptional-talent/>.
- Editors. 2021. "Maren Morris Biography." *A&E Television Networks*, April 19, 2021. <https://www.biography.com/musician/maren-morris>.
- Everts, Rick, Pauwke Berkers, and Erik Hitters. 2022. "Milestones in Music: Reputations in the Career Building of Musicians in the Changing Dutch Music Industry." *Poetics* 92: 101647-. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.poetic.2022.101647>.
- Garcia, Thania. 2023. "Country Music's Historic Streaming Spike Is Being Fueled by Gen Z and Millennials." *Variety*, April 4, 2023. <https://variety.com/2023/music/news/cmts-morgan-wallen-country-streaming-march-1235573629/>.
- Goldman Sachs. n.d. "Music in the Air." Accessed January 6, 2023. <https://www.goldmansachs.com/intelligence/pages/infographics/music-streaming/>.
- Götting, Marie Charlotte. 2022. "Recorded music industry - Global Revenue 2021." *Statista*, May 25, 2022. Accessed January 13, 2023. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/272305/global-revenue-of-the-music-industry/>.
- Götting, Marie Charlotte. 2022. "Top-selling Artists of All Time Worldwide." *Statista*, December 8, 2022. Accessed January 13, 2023. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/271174/top-selling-artists-in-the-united-states/>.

- Grein, Paul. 2023. "2023 ACM Awards Reports 87% Year-Over-Year Audience Growth." *Billboard*, June 5, 2023. <https://www.billboard.com/music/awards/2023-acm-awards-year-over-year-audience-growth-1235345880/>.
- Hendricks, Ken, and Alan Sorensen. 2009. "Information and the Skewness of Music Sales." *Journal of Political Economy* 117, no. 2: 324-369. <https://doi.org/10.1086/599283>.
- Kretschmer, Tobias, and Christian Peukert. 2020. "Video Killed the Radio Star? Online Music Videos and Recorded Music Sales." *Information Systems Research* 31, no. 3: 776-800. <https://doi.org/10.1287/isre.2019.0915>.
- Lamare, Amy. 2018. "By The End Of The Decade, Country Star Toby Keith Could Be A Billionaire." *Celebrity Net Worth*, April 17, 2018. <https://www.celebritynetworth.com/articles/entertainment-articles/end-decade-country-star-toby-keith-will-billionaire/>.
- Leenders, Mark A. A. M., Mark A. Farrell, Koos Zwaan, and Tom F. M. ter Bogt. 2015. "How Are Young Music Artists Configuring Their Media and Sales Platforms in the Digital Age?" *Journal of Marketing Management* 31, no. 17-18: 1799-1817. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0267257X.2015.1034158>.
- Luminate. 2022. "Luminate U.S. Year-End Music Report for 2022." *Luminate*. Accessed on June 20, 2023. <https://luminatedata.com/reports/luminate-2022-u-s-year-end-report/>.
- Nashville Music City. n.d. "The Story of Music City." Accessed June 16, 2023. <https://www.visitmusiccity.com/explore-nashville/music/story-music-city>.
- News Team. 2023. "Study finds social media crucial for music discovery among Gen Z: Wasserman Report." *News On The Up*, March 7, 2023. <https://www.newsontheup.com/2023/03/07/study-finds-social-media-crucial-for-music-discovery-among-gen-z-wasserman-report/>.
- Ray, Michael. 2022. "Carrie Underwood." *Britannica*, March 6, 2022. <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Carrie-Underwood>.
- Rhiannon, Alexis. 2017. "Here's how the Grammy winners are actually picked." *Insider: Bustle*, February 12, 2017. <https://www.businessinsider.com/how-grammy-winners-are-picked-2017-2>.
- RIAA. n.d. "U.S. sales database." *RIAA*. Accessed January 13, 2023. <https://www.riaa.com/u-s-sales-database/>.



- Roland. n.d. "Do You Need To Sign A Music Publishing Contract." *Roland*. Accessed June 16, 2023. <https://www.roland.com/uk/blog/music-publishing-contract/>.
- Rolling Stone. n.d. "Off The Beaten Path." *Rolling Stone*. <https://www.rollingstone.com/interactive/off-the-beaten-path-nashville/>.
- Salas-Rodriguez, Israel, Catherine Micallef, Tereza Shkurta, and Ashley Vega. 2022. "What Does the Winner of The Voice Get?" *The U.S. Sun*, December 14, 2022. <https://www.the-sun.com/entertainment/2954160/the-prize-for-winner-of-the-voice/>.
- Spencer, Samuel. 2021. "'American Idol' Final 2021: What the Winner Actually Wins." *Newsweek*, May 23, 2021. <https://www.newsweek.com/american-idol-2021-winner-what-do-they-win-prize-record-deal-1593570>.
- Spotify for Artists. 2019. "Our Playlist Ecosystem Is Evolving: Here's What It Means for Artists & Their Teams." *Spotify for Artists*. Accessed June 20, 2023. <https://artists.spotify.com/blog/our-playlist-ecosystem-is-evolving>.
- Staff. 2019. "Why is Nashville called Music City? The Fisk Jubilee Singers and Queen Victoria Get the Credit." *The Tennessean*, February 19, 2019. <https://www.tennessean.com/story/life/2019/02/19/why-nashville-called-music-city/2906635002/>.
- Tompkins, Terry, Ulf Oesterle, and Charles Alexander. 2021. "Indie Folk and Americana Triggers: An Analysis of Streaming Music, Audience Behavior, and Global Opportunity." *Journal of the Music and Entertainment Industry Educators Association* 21, no. 1: 91-125. <https://doi.org/10.25101/21.4>.
- Watson, Jada. 2019. "Gender on the Billboard Hot Country Songs Chart, 1996-2016." *Popular Music and Society* 42, no. 5: 538-560. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03007766.2018.1512070>.
- Whateley, Dan. 2023. "How TikTok is Changing the Music Industry and the Way We Discover New, Popular Songs." *Insider*, April, 27, 2023. <https://www.businessinsider.com/how-tiktok-is-changing-the-music-industry-marketing-discovery-2021-7>.
- Whitaker, Sterling. 2021. "How Does the CMA Awards Voting Work?" *Taste of Country*, November 10, 2021. <https://tasteofcountry.com/how-does-cma-awards-voting-work/>.
- Zwaan, Koos, and Tom F. M. ter Bogt. 2009. "Research Note: Breaking into the Popular Record Industry: An Insider's View on the Career

Entry of Pop Musicians.” *European Journal of Communication* 24, no. 1: 89-101. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0267323108098948>.

## **Appendix: Artist Data References**

---

- Academy of Country Music. 2022. “ACM Winners: Female Artist of the Year 2000-2022.” *Academy of Country Music*. <https://www.acmcountry.com/winners?awardTitle=&awardCategory=Female+Vocalist+of+the+Year&awardYear=&actionButton=Submit>.
- . 2022. “ACM Winners: Male Artist of the Year 2000-2022.” *Academy of Country Music*. <https://www.acmcountry.com/winners?awardTitle=&awardCategory=Male+Vocalist+of+the+Year&awardYear=&actionButton=Submit>.
- AceShowBiz. 2022. “Sara Evans Biography.” *AceShowBiz*. [https://www.aceshowbiz.com/celebrity/sara\\_evans/biography.html](https://www.aceshowbiz.com/celebrity/sara_evans/biography.html).
- Allers, Hannahlee. 2013. “Kelsea Ballerini Signs with Black River Entertainment.” *The Boot*, December 23, 2013. <https://theboot.com/kelsea-ballerini-black-river-entertainment/>.
- AllMusic. n.d. “Artist Biographies.” *AllMusic*.  
<https://www.allmusic.com/artist/alan-jackson-mn0000605375/discography>.  
<https://www.allmusic.com/artist/ashley-mcbryde-mn0002011786/discography>.  
<https://www.allmusic.com/artist/blake-shelton-mn000046814/discography>.  
<https://www.allmusic.com/artist/blanco-brown-mn0003836326/discography>.  
<https://www.allmusic.com/artist/brad-paisley-mn0000610880/discography>.  
<https://www.allmusic.com/artist/brantley-gilbert-mn0001657214/discography>.  
<https://www.allmusic.com/artist/brett-eldredge-mn0002419025/discography>.  
<https://www.allmusic.com/artist/brett-young-mn0001580437/discography>.  
<https://www.allmusic.com/artist/carolyn-dawn-johnson-mn0000180617/discography>.  
<https://www.allmusic.com/artist/carrie-underwood-mn0000861252/discography?1687141571862>.  
<https://www.allmusic.com/artist/chris-stapleton-mn0001766237/discography>.  
<https://www.allmusic.com/artist/cole-swindell-mn0002795282/discography>.  
<https://www.allmusic.com/artist/darius-rucker-mn0000956675/discography>.  
<https://www.allmusic.com/artist/easton-corbin-mn0001599476/discography>.  
<https://www.allmusic.com/artist/eric-church-mn0000632233/discography>.  
<https://www.allmusic.com/artist/faith-hill-mn0000162269/discography>.  
<https://www.allmusic.com/artist/gabby-barrett-mn0003747024/discography>.  
<https://www.allmusic.com/artist/garth-brooks-mn0000798248/discography>.  
<https://www.allmusic.com/artist/george-strait-mn0000944084/discography>.  
<https://www.allmusic.com/artist/gretchen-wilson-mn0000196976/discography>.  
<https://www.allmusic.com/artist/hunter-hayes-mn0000635686/discography>.  
<https://www.allmusic.com/artist/jack-ingram-mn0000098688/discography>.  
<https://www.allmusic.com/artist/jake-owen-mn0001009342/discography>.  
<https://www.allmusic.com/artist/jamie-oneal-mn0000808003/discography>.

<https://www.allmusic.com/artist/jana-kramer-mn0002701931/discography>.  
<https://www.allmusic.com/artist/jason-aldean-mn0000318882/discography>.  
<https://www.allmusic.com/artist/jason-michael-carroll-mn0000617689/discography>.  
<https://www.allmusic.com/artist/jimmie-allen-mn0003672595/discography>.  
<https://www.allmusic.com/artist/joe-nichols-mn0000807869/discography>.  
<https://www.allmusic.com/artist/jon-pardi-mn0002571765/discography>.  
<https://www.allmusic.com/artist/jordan-davis-mn0003629629/discography>.  
<https://www.allmusic.com/artist/julianne-hough-mn0000993271/discography>.  
<https://www.allmusic.com/artist/justin-moore-mn0000864411/discography>.  
<https://www.allmusic.com/artist/kacey-musgraves-mn0002077491/discography>.  
<https://www.allmusic.com/artist/keith-urban-mn0000081619/discography>.  
<https://www.allmusic.com/artist/kellie-coffey-mn0000768328/discography>.  
<https://www.allmusic.com/artist/kelsea-ballerini-mn0003312551/discography>.  
<https://www.allmusic.com/artist/kenny-chesney-mn0000068551/discography>.  
<https://www.allmusic.com/artist/lauren-alaina-mn0002702852/discography>.  
<https://www.allmusic.com/artist/lainey-wilson-mn0003508331/discography>.  
<https://www.allmusic.com/artist/lee-ann-womack-mn0000194063/discography>.  
<https://www.allmusic.com/artist/luke-bryan-mn0000502198/discography>.  
<https://www.allmusic.com/artist/luke-combs-mn0003462371/discography>.  
<https://www.allmusic.com/artist/miranda-lambert-mn0000503242/discography>.  
<https://www.allmusic.com/artist/maren-morris-mn0000328633/discography>.  
<https://www.allmusic.com/artist/martina-mcbride-mn0000368112/discography>.  
<https://www.allmusic.com/artist/morgan-wallen-mn0003351348/discography?1687321687727>.  
<https://www.allmusic.com/artist/parker-mccollum-mn0003377460/discography>.  
<https://www.allmusic.com/artist/phil-vassar-mn0000342004/discography>.  
<https://www.allmusic.com/artist/riley-green-mn0003672594/discography>.  
<https://www.allmusic.com/artist/rodney-atkins-mn0000298824/discography>.  
<https://www.allmusic.com/artist/sara-evans-mn0000248920/discography>.  
<https://www.allmusic.com/artist/sam-hunt-mn0002674420/discography>.  
<https://www.allmusic.com/artist/scotty-mccreery-mn0002702854/discography>.  
<https://www.allmusic.com/artist/shania-twain-mn0000161808/discography>.  
<https://www.allmusic.com/artist/taylor-swift-mn0000472102/discography>.  
<https://www.allmusic.com/artist/tenille-townes-mn0002047255/discography>.  
<https://www.allmusic.com/artist/thomas-rhett-mn0002872994/discography>.  
<https://www.allmusic.com/artist/tim-mcgraw-mn0000592954/discography>.  
<https://www.allmusic.com/artist/toby-keith-mn0000510805/discography>.  
<https://www.allmusic.com/artist/vince-gill-mn0000214162/discography>.  
<https://www.allmusic.com/artist/zach-bryan-mn0003941326/discography>.

Apar, Corey. n.d. “Jake Owen Biography.” *AllMusic*. <https://www.allmusic.com/artist/jake-owen-mn0001009342/biography>.

Apumone. n.d. “Jordan Davis Net Worth 2022, Age, Wife, Children, Height, Family, Parents, Songs.” *Apumone*. <https://www.apumone.com/jordan-davis-net-worth/>.

Arbour, Mallory. 2022. “Lauren Alaina Exits Longtime Record Label After Nearly 11 Years.” *CountryTown*, April 7, 2022. [https://countrytown.com/news/lauren-alaina-exits-longtime-record-label-after-nearly-11-years/qT6xvby\\_vqE/07-04-22](https://countrytown.com/news/lauren-alaina-exits-longtime-record-label-after-nearly-11-years/qT6xvby_vqE/07-04-22).

- Bauer, Lotha, Rodriguez, Amy Tikkanen, and The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica. 2021. "Faith Hill." *Britannica*, December 20, 2021. <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Faith-Hill>.
- Big Machine Label Group. 2017. "Big Machine Label Group Signs Carly Pearce." *Big Machine Label Group*, January 23, 2017. <https://www.bigmachinelabelgroup.com/big-machine-label-group-signs-carly-pearce/>.
- . 2016. "Big Machine Music Signs Luke Combs To Publishing Deal." *Big Machine Label Group*, October 13, 2016. <https://www.bigmachinelabelgroup.com/big-machine-music-signs-luke-combs-publishing-deal/>.
- . 2018. "BMLG Records Signs Riley Green." *Big Machine Label Group*, February 22, 2018. <https://www.bigmachinelabelgroup.com/bmlg-records-signs-riley-green/>.
- Big Loud Records. 2016. "Big Loud Records Adds Morgan Wallen to Roster." *Big Loud Records*, August 15, 2016. <https://bigloudrecords.com/big-loud-records-adds-morgan-wallen-to-roster/>.
- Billboard. 2022. "Year-End Charts: Top Country Artists." *Billboard*. <https://www.billboard.com/charts/year-end/2006-2021/top-country-artists/>.
- . 2022. "Year-End Charts: Top Country Artists-Female" *Billboard*. <https://www.billboard.com/charts/year-end/2006-2021/country-artists-female/>.
- . 2022. "Year-End Charts: Top Country Artists-Male." *Billboard*. <https://www.billboard.com/charts/year-end/2006-2021/country-artists-male/>.
- Billboard Staff. 2014. "After Digital Success, Country Singer Brantley Gilbert Ascends at Radio as 'Bottoms Up' Tops Charts." *Billboard*, March, 14, 2014. <https://www.billboard.com/music/music-news/after-digital-success-country-singer-brantley-gilbert-ascends-at-5937509/>.
- Black, Lauren. 2018. "How Carly Pearce Became Country Music's New 'It Girl'." *Forbes*, November 19, 2018. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/laurenjoblack/2018/11/19/how-carly-pearce-became-country-musics-new-it-girl/>.
- Black, Lauren Jo. 2013. "Cole Swindell Inks Recording Contract with Warner Music Nashville." *Sounds Like Nashville*. July 22, 2013.

- <https://www.soundslikenashville.com/news/cole-swindell-inks-recording-contract-with-warner-music-nashville/>.
- Boot Staff. 2021. "10 Things You Might Not Know About Blake Shelton." *The Boot*, June 18, 2021. <https://theboot.com/10-things-you-didnt-know-about-the-voice-blake-shelton/>.
- . 2021. "32 Years Ago: Alan Jackson Signs His First Recording Contract." *The Boot*, June 26, 2021. <https://theboot.com/alan-jackson-first-recording-contract/>.
- . 2020. "How Did Tim Mcgraw Get His First Record Deal?" *The Boot*, May 1, 2020. <https://theboot.com/tim-mcgraw-first-record-deal/>.
- . 2017. "Sara Evans' First Time On The Radio: Yes, There Were Tears." *The Boot*, April 20, 2017. <https://theboot.com/sara-evans-three-chords-and-the-truth-songs/>.
- Brian, Greg. 2019. "How Old Was Taylor Swift When She Signed Her First Record Deal?" *Showbiz CheatSheet*, January 28, 2019. <https://www.cheatsheet.com/entertainment/how-old-was-taylor-swift-when-she-signed-her-first-record-deal.html>.
- Brown, John. 2023. "Lainey Wilson Net Worth 2023." *CA Knowledge*, April 3, 2023. <https://caknowledge.com/lainey-wilson-net-worth/>.
- Bush, John. n.d. "Sara Evans Artist Biography." *All Music*, <https://www.allmusic.com/artist/sara-evans-mn0000248920/biography?1647437900083>.
- Celebrity Net Worth. n.d. *Celebrity Net Worth*.  
<https://www.celebritynetworth.com/richest-celebrities/rock-stars/alan-jackson-net-worth/>.  
<https://www.celebritynetworth.com/richest-celebrities/singers/blake-shelton-net-worth/>.  
<https://www.celebritynetworth.com/richest-celebrities/singers/brad-paisley-net-worth/>.  
<https://www.celebritynetworth.com/richest-celebrities/singers/brantley-gilbert-net-worth/>.  
<https://www.celebritynetworth.com/richest-celebrities/singers/brett-eldredge-net-worth/>.  
<https://www.celebritynetworth.com/richest-celebrities/singers/carrie-underwood-net-worth/>.  
<https://www.celebritynetworth.com/richest-celebrities/singers/chris-stapleton-net-worth/>.  
<https://www.celebritynetworth.com/richest-celebrities/singers/cole-swindell-net-worth/>.  
<https://www.celebritynetworth.com/richest-celebrities/rock-stars/darius-rucker-net-worth/>.  
<https://www.celebritynetworth.com/richest-celebrities/singers/eric-church-net-worth/>.  
<https://www.celebritynetworth.com/richest-celebrities/singers/faith-hill-net-worth/>.  
<https://www.celebritynetworth.com/richest-celebrities/singers/garth-brooks-net-worth/>.

<https://www.celebritynetworth.com/richest-celebrities/singers/george-strait-net-worth/>.  
<https://www.celebritynetworth.com/richest-celebrities/actors/gretchen-wilson-net-worth/>.  
<https://www.celebritynetworth.com/richest-celebrities/singers/hunter-hayes-net-worth/>.  
<https://www.celebritynetworth.com/richest-celebrities/singers/jack-ingram-net-worth/>.  
<https://www.celebritynetworth.com/richest-celebrities/singers/jake-owen-net-worth/>.  
<https://www.celebritynetworth.com/richest-celebrities/singers/jana-kramer-net-worth/>.  
<https://www.celebritynetworth.com/richest-celebrities/singers/jason-aldean-net-worth/>.  
<https://www.celebritynetworth.com/richest-celebrities/singers/joe-nichols-net-worth/>.  
<https://www.celebritynetworth.com/richest-celebrities/singers/jon-pardi-net-worth/>.  
<https://www.celebritynetworth.com/richest-celebrities/singers/julianne-hough-net-worth/>.  
<https://www.celebritynetworth.com/richest-celebrities/singers/justin-moore-net-worth/>.  
<https://www.celebritynetworth.com/richest-celebrities/singers/kacey-musgraves-net-worth/>.  
<https://www.celebritynetworth.com/richest-celebrities/singers/kelsea-ballerini-net-worth/>.  
<https://www.celebritynetworth.com/richest-celebrities/singers/kenny-chesney-net-worth/>.  
<https://www.celebritynetworth.com/richest-celebrities/singers/keith-urban-net-worth/>.  
<https://www.celebritynetworth.com/richest-celebrities/singers/lauren-alaina-net-worth/>.  
<https://www.celebritynetworth.com/richest-celebrities/singers/lee-ann-womack-net-worth/>.  
<https://www.celebritynetworth.com/richest-celebrities/singers/luke-bryan-net-worth/>.  
<https://www.celebritynetworth.com/richest-celebrities/singers/luke-combs-net-worth/>.  
<https://www.celebritynetworth.com/richest-celebrities/singers/martina-mcbride-net-worth/>.  
<https://www.celebritynetworth.com/richest-celebrities/singers/miranda-lambert-net-worth/>.  
<https://www.celebritynetworth.com/richest-celebrities/singers/morgan-wallen-net-worth/>.  
<https://www.celebritynetworth.com/richest-celebrities/singers/phil-vassar-net-worth/>.  
<https://www.celebritynetworth.com/richest-celebrities/singers/sara-evans-net-worth/>.  
<https://www.celebritynetworth.com/richest-celebrities/singers/sam-hunt-net-worth/>.  
<https://www.celebritynetworth.com/richest-celebrities/singers/scotty-mccreery-net-worth/>.  
<https://www.celebritynetworth.com/richest-celebrities/singers/shania-twain-net-worth/>.  
<https://www.celebritynetworth.com/richest-celebrities/singers/taylor-swift-net-worth/>.  
<https://www.celebritynetworth.com/richest-celebrities/singers/tim-mcgraw-net-worth/>.  
<https://www.celebritynetworth.com/richest-celebrities/singers/thomas-rhett-net-worth/>.  
<https://www.celebritynetworth.com/richest-celebrities/singers/toby-keith-net-worth/>.  
<https://www.celebritynetworth.com/richest-celebrities/singers/vince-gill-net-worth/>.

Chartmetric. Accessed April 13, 2023. <https://chartmetric.com>.

Clancy, Sam. 2019. "How a Landlady and a Cassette Changed the Lives of a St. Louis Man and Garth Brooks." *5 On Your Side*, May 1, 2019. <https://www.ksdk.com/article/news/how-a-landlady-and-a->

- [cassette-changed-the-lives-of-a-st-louis-man-and-garth-brooks/63-89dfafb6-69be-424f-a8c6-65325f5d371d.](https://www.cmaawards.com/past-winners-and-nominees/)
- CMA Awards. 2021. *CMAAwards.com*. <https://cmaawards.com/past-winners-and-nominees/>.  
 “CMA past winners: Entertainer of the year.”  
 “CMA past winners: Female vocalist of the year.”  
 “CMA past winners: Male vocalist of the year.”
- CMT.com Staff. 2003. “Strait To The Hall Of Fame.” *CMT News*, June 6, 2003. <https://www.cmt.com/news/3vz5bv/strait-to-the-hall-of-fame>.
- Collar, Matt. n.d. “Jason Michael Carroll Biography.” *AllMusic*. <https://www.allmusic.com/artist/jason-michael-carroll-mn0000617689/biography>.
- . n.d. “Lauren Alaina Biography.” *AllMusic*. <https://www.allmusic.com/artist/lauren-alaina-mn0002702852/biography>.
- Conaway, Alanna. 2011. “Thomas Rhett Gets His Turn in the Spotlight.” *Taste of Country*, July 21, 2011. <https://tasteofcountry.com/thomas-rhett-interview/>.
- Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum Nashville. n.d. “George Strait.” *CountryMusicHallofFame.org*. <https://countrymusichalloffame.org/artist/george-strait/>.
- Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum Nashville. n.d. “Kasey Musgraves: All of the Colors.” *CountryMusicHallofFame.org*. <https://countrymusichalloffame.org/exhibit/kacey-musgraves-all-of-the-colors/>.
- Country Standard Time. n.d. “Arista Signs Jason Michael Carroll.” *Country Standard Time*. <https://www.countrystandardtime.com/news/newsitem.asp?xid=265>.
- Demalon, Tom. n.d. “Kellie Coffey Biography.” *AllMusic*. <https://www.allmusic.com/artist/kellie-coffey-mn0000768328/biography>.
- Deming, Mark. n.d. “Artist Biographies.” *AllMusic*.  
<https://www.allmusic.com/artist/ashley-mcbryde-mn0002011786/biography>.  
<https://www.allmusic.com/artist/brett-young-mn0001580437/biography>.  
<https://www.allmusic.com/artist/hunter-hayes-mn0000635686/biography>.  
<https://www.allmusic.com/artist/lainey-wilson-mn0003508331/biography>.  
<https://www.allmusic.com/artist/morgan-wallen-mn0003351348/biography>.
- Dillon, Charlotte. n.d. “Carolyn Dawn Johnson Biography.” *AllMusic*. <https://www.allmusic.com/artist/carolyn-dawn-johnson-mn0000180617/biography>.
- Donelson, Marcy. n.d. “Artist Biographies.” *AllMusic*.  
<https://www.allmusic.com/artist/gabby-barrett-mn0003747024/biography>.  
<https://www.allmusic.com/artist/jana-kramer-mn0002701931/biography>.

Duvall, Erin. 2011. "Scotty McCreery & Lauren Alaina Sign with Mercury Nashville." *The Boot*, June 2, 2011. <https://theboot.com/scotty-mccreery-lauren-alaina-record-label-mercury-nashville/>.

Editors. Various Dates. "Artist Biographies." *Biography.com*.

<https://www.biography.com/musician/blake-shelton>.  
<https://www.biography.com/musician/brad-paisley>.  
<https://www.biography.com/musician/carrie-underwood>.  
<https://www.biography.com/musician/darius-rucker>.  
<https://www.biography.com/musician/faith-hill>.  
<https://www.biography.com/musician/garth-brooks>.  
<https://www.biography.com/musician/gretchen-wilson>.  
<https://www.biography.com/musician/keith-urban>.  
<https://www.biography.com/musician/luke-bryan>.  
<https://www.biography.com/musician/maren-morris>.  
<https://www.biography.com/musician/miranda-lambert>.  
<https://www.biography.com/musician/shania-twain>.  
<https://www.biography.com/musicians/taylor-swift>.  
<https://www.biography.com/musician/thomas-rhett>.  
<https://www.biography.com/musician/tim-mcgraw>.  
<https://www.biography.com/musicians/vince-gill>.

Elkins, Kathleen. 2019. "Country star Brett Young did bar gigs for 13 years before landing his first record deal." *CNBC Make It*, June 27, 2019. <https://www.cbc.com/2019/06/27/how-brett-young-became-a-country-music-star.html>.

Emily. 2023. "Ashley McBryde Talks with Bobby and Performs New Song & Covers of 'Neon Moon,' 'Strawberry Wine,' and 'Wide Open Spaces'." *US106.1 Real Country*, March 14, 2023. <https://us1061.com/interviews/ashley-mcbryde-talks-with-bobby-and-performs-new-song-covers-of-neon-moon-strawberry-wine-and-wide-open-spaces/>.

Erlewine, Stephen Thomas. n.d. "Artist Biographies." *AllMusic*.

<https://www.allmusic.com/artist/blanco-brown-mn0003836326/biography?1687376891189>.  
<https://www.allmusic.com/artist/brad-paisley-mn0000610880/biography>.  
<https://www.allmusic.com/artist/chris-stapleton-mn0001766237/biography>.  
<https://www.allmusic.com/artist/cole-swindell-mn0002795282/biography>.  
<https://www.allmusic.com/artist/jack-ingram-mn0000098688/biography>.  
<https://www.allmusic.com/artist/jimmie-allen-mn0003672595/biography?1681338122448>.  
<https://www.allmusic.com/artist/jon-pardi-mn0002571765/biography?1681334894966>.  
<https://www.allmusic.com/artist/jordan-davis-mn0003629629/biography>.  
<https://www.allmusic.com/artist/justin-moore-mn0000864411/biography>.  
<https://www.allmusic.com/artist/lee-ann-womack-mn0000194063/biography>.  
<https://www.allmusic.com/artist/luke-combs-mn0003462371/biography?1687322725398>.  
<https://www.allmusic.com/artist/parker-mccollum-mn0003377460/biography>.



<https://www.allmusic.com/artist/riley-green-mn0003672594/biography>.  
<https://www.allmusic.com/artist/rodney-atkins-mn0000298824/biography>.  
<https://www.allmusic.com/artist/sam-hunt-mn0002674420/biography>.  
<https://www.allmusic.com/artist/zach-bryan-mn0003941326/biography?1681338919179>.

- Evans, Sid. (2022). "Jake Owen Shares the Family Stories that Keep Him Going." *Southern Living*, May 1, 2022. <https://www.southernliving.com/biscuits-and-jam-podcast/jake-owen>.
- Famous Birthdays. n.d. "Artist Birthdays." *Famous Birthdays*. <https://www.famousbirthdays.com/>.
- Famous Singers. 2022. "Shania Twain." *FamousSingers.org*. <http://www.famoussingers.org/shania-twain>.
- Fandom. n.d. "Vince Gill." *Fandom*. [https://countrymusic.fandom.com/wiki/Vince\\_Gill](https://countrymusic.fandom.com/wiki/Vince_Gill).
- Faubert, V. 2021. "Kellie Coffey Interview." *FamousInterview.com*, January 9, 2021. <https://famousinterview.com/country-music/kellie-coffey-interview/>.
- Gabby Barrett Live. 2022. "Gabby Barrett Biography." *GabbyBarrett.net*. <https://gabbybarrett.net/gabby-barrett/biography/>.
- Haggerty, Victoria. 2017. "Justin Moore & Wife Kate Celebrate 10th Wedding Anniversary." *CountryFanCast*. October 5, 2017. <https://countryfancast.com/justin-moore-wife-kate-10/>.
- Harabadian, Eric. 2017. "Signing Story: Luke Combs." *Music Connection*. March 28, 2017. <https://www.musicconnection.com/signing-story-luke-combs/>.
- Hattenstone, Simon. 2018. "Shania Twain on abuse, betrayal, and finding her voice: 'I wanted a break - but not for 15 years'." *The Guardian*, April 22, 2018. <https://www.theguardian.com/music/2018/apr/22/shania-twain-unexpected-return-freak-illness-country-pop-star>.
- Hautman, Nicholas. 2021. "Miranda Lambert Through the Years: From 'Nashville Star' to Country Icon." *Us Weekly*, November 10, 2021. <https://www.usmagazine.com/celebrity-news/pictures/miranda-lambert-through-the-years-nashville-star-music-marriages/>.
- Herrera, Monica. 2011. "Scotty McCreery, Lauren Alaina Sign with Mercury Nashville." *Billboard*, June 6, 2011. <https://www.billboard.com/music/music-news/scotty-mccreery-lauren-alaina-sign-with-mercury-nashville-470835/>.

- Hess, Amanda. 2021. "Kacey Musgraves's Expanding Universe." *The New York Times*, September 21, 2021. <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/08/26/arts/music/kacey-musgraves-star-crossed.html>.
- Hight, Jewly. 2010. "Jason Aldean Kicks Doors Wide Open." *BMI MusicWorld*, March 26, 2010. [https://www.bmi.com/news/entry/jason\\_aldean\\_kicks\\_doors\\_wide\\_open](https://www.bmi.com/news/entry/jason_aldean_kicks_doors_wide_open).
- Hollabaugh, Lorie. 2017. "Ashley McBryde Signs With Warner Music Nashville." September 22, 2017, *Music Row*. <https://musicrow.com/2017/09/ashley-mcbride-signs-with-warner-music-nashville/>.
- Hollabaugh, Lorie. 2017. "Jimmie Allen Signs With BBR Music Group/BMG." *Music Row*, August 1, 2017. <https://musicrow.com/2017/08/jimmie-allen-signs-with-bbr-music-groupbmg/>.
- Holler. n.d. "Kacey Musgraves." *Holler*. <https://holler.country/artists/kacey-musgraves>.
- Huey, Steve. n.d. "Artist Biographies." *AllMusic*.  
<https://www.allmusic.com/artist/alan-jackson-mn0000605375/biography>.  
<https://www.allmusic.com/artist/joe-nichols-mn0000807869/biography>.  
<https://www.allmusic.com/artist/kenny-chesney-mn0000068551/biography>.  
<https://www.allmusic.com/artist/martina-mcbride-mn0000368112/biography>.  
<https://www.allmusic.com/artist/phil-vassar-mn0000342004/biography>.  
<https://www.allmusic.com/artist/toby-keith-mn0000510805/biography>.
- Idol Net Worth. n.d. "Artist Net Worth." *Idol Net Worth*.  
<https://www.idolnetworth.com/carolyn-dawn-johnson-net-worth-263955>.  
<https://www.idolnetworth.com/easton-corbin-net-worth-256639>.  
<https://www.idolnetworth.com/jamie-oneal-net-worth-247864>.  
<https://www.idolnetworth.com/jason-michael-carroll-net-worth-247404>.  
<https://www.idolnetworth.com/kellie-coffey-net-worth-201515>.
- Invictus Entertainment Group. n.d. *Invictus Entertainment Group*.  
 "Carolyn Dawn Johnson Biography." <http://www.iegroupp.ca/artists/carolyn-dawn-johnson/>.
- Jose. 2023. "Zach Bryan Net Worth." *Gorilla Overview*, June 6, 2023. <https://gorillaoverview.com/zach-bryan-net-worth/>.
- Kruh, Nancy. 2022. "Lainey Wilson Celebrates a New Album and Six CMA Nominations: 'It Really Is Insane'." *People*, October 28, 2022. <https://people.com/country/lainey-wilson-releases-bell-bottom-country-celebrates-six-cma-award-nominations/>.
- Lamare, Amy. 2018. "By The End Of The Decade, Country Star Toby Keith Could Be A Billionaire." *Celebrity Net Worth*, April 17, 2018. <https://www.celebritynetworth.com/articles/entertainment-articles/end-decade-country-star-toby-keith-will-billionaire/>.

- Last.fm. n.d. *Last.fm*. “Artist Biographies.”  
<https://www.last.fm/music/Brett+Young/Country+in+California+-+EP>.  
<https://www.last.fm/music/Kellie+Coffey/+wiki>.  
<https://www.last.fm/music/Tenille+Townes/+wiki?ver=1>.
- Leggett, Steve. n.d. “Artist Biographies.” *AllMusic*.  
<https://www.allmusic.com/artist/brantley-gilbert-mn0001657214/biography>.  
<https://www.allmusic.com/artist/easton-corbin-mn0001599476/biography>.  
<https://www.allmusic.com/artist/jason-aldean-mn0000318882/biography>.  
<https://www.allmusic.com/artist/kelsea-ballerini-mn0003312551/biography>.
- Leahey, Andrew. n.d. “Scotty McCreery Biography.” *AllMusic*. <https://www.allmusic.com/artist/scotty-mccreery-mn0002702854/biography>.
- Levy, Joe. 2016. “Meet Maren Morris: How a Nineties Pop Fan Became Country’s Breakout Star.” *Rolling Stone*, June 2, 2016. <https://www.rollingstone.com/music/music-features/meet-maren-morris-how-a-nineties-pop-fan-became-countrys-breakout-star-38174/>.
- Loftus, Johnny. n.d. “Jamie O’Neal Biography.” *AllMusic*. <https://www.allmusic.com/artist/jamie-oneal-mn0000808003/biography>.
- Martin, Scarlett. 2021. “Eric Church: A Look Back at ‘The Chief’ of Country Music’s Incredible Career Through the Years.” *Absolute Radio Country*, July 9, 2021. <https://planetradio.co.uk/absolute-radio-country/entertainment/music/eric-church/>.
- Mazak, Grant. 2014. “Ace in the Hole Band.” *Texas State Historical Association*, July 25, 2014. <https://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/entries/ace-in-the-hole-band>.
- McHugh, Catherine. 2022. “Chris Stapleton Biography.” *Biography.com*, April 4, 2022. <https://www.biography.com/musician/chris-stapleton>.
- Michelle. 2011. “EMI Signs Jon Pardi.” *Music Row*, July 15, 2011. <https://musicrow.com/2011/07/emi-signs-jon-pardi/>.
- Mier, Tomás. 2021. “Morgan Wallen’s Ups and Downs: From ‘The Voice’ and Breaking Records To ‘SNL’ and Racial Slur Controversy.” *People Magazine*, February 11, 2021. <https://people.com/country/morgan-wallen-ups-downs-timeline-racial-slur-controversy/>.
- Morris, Edward. 2005. “Garth Brooks Leaves Capitol Records.” *CMT News*, June 3, 2005. <https://www.cmt.com/news/pnmdaz/garth-brooks-leaves-capitol-records>.
- . 2011. “Jason Aldean Discusses His Career Development at Music Conference.” *CMT News*, June 7, 2011. <http://www.cmt.com/>

- [news/1665348/jason-aldean-discusses-his-career-development-at-music-conference/](https://www.musicmayhem.com/news/1665348/jason-aldean-discusses-his-career-development-at-music-conference/).
- Music Mayhem. 2019. "Gabby Barretts Officially Signs With Warner Music Nashville." *Music Mayhem*. June 26, 2019. <https://music-mayhemmagazine.com/gabby-barretts-officially-signs-with-warner-music-nashville/>.
- Musician Guide. n.d. "Artist Biographies." *Net Industries*.  
<https://musicianguide.com/biographies/1608003837/Keith-Urban.html>.  
<https://musicianguide.com/biographies/1608003668/Brad-Paisley.html>.  
<https://musicianguide.com/biographies/1608003658/Tim-McGraw.html>.
- Net Worth Gorilla. 2023. "Carly Pearce Net Worth 2023; Income, Boyfriend & Biography." *Net Worth Gorilla*. <https://networthgorilla.com/carly-pearce-net-worth/>.
- Net Worth Planet. 2023. "Gabby Barrett Net Worth." *Net Worth Planet*. <https://networthplanet.com/musicians/gabby-barrett-net-worth.html>.
- Net Worth Post. 2023. "Rodney Atkins Net Worth." *Net Worth Post*. <https://networthpost.org/net-worth/rodney-atkins-net-worth/>.
- Netemeyer, Sarah. 2017. "Blake Shelton Re-ups With Record Label, Warner Music Nashville." *Country Fancast*. December 21, 2017. <https://countryfancast.com/blake-shelton-record-label/>.
- Nicholson, Jessica. 2018. "Brad Paisley Extends Deal With Sony Music Nashville." *Music Row*. April 19, 2018. <https://musicrow.com/2018/04/brad-paisley-extends-deal-with-sony-music-nashville/>.
- . 2018. "Exclusive: Lainey Wilson Signs With Broken Bow Records." *Music Row*. August 13, 2023. <https://musicrow.com/2018/08/exclusive-lainey-wilson-signs-with-broken-bow-records/>.
- . 2015. "Sony Music Nashville Signs Singer-Songwriter Maren Morris." *Music Row*. September 10, 2015. <https://musicrow.com/2015/09/sony-music-nashville-signs-singer-songwriter-maren-morris/>.
- Opry. n.d. "Opry Nextstage: Tenille Townes." *Opry*. <https://www.opry.com/artists/tenille-townes>.
- Opry. n.d. "Phil Vassar." *Opry*. <https://www.opry.com/artists/phil-vassar>.
- Ott, Tim. 2019. "Jason Aldean biography." *Biography.com*, November 22, 2019. <https://www.biography.com/musician/jason-aldean>.

- Pearl Records, Inc. 2016. "Pearl Records." *Pearl Records, Inc.* <http://pearlrecordsinc.com/>.
- Pelicano, Nicco. 2021. "Taylor Swift opens up old wounds as she reclaims her first six albums." *Hilltop Views*, December 13, 2021. <https://www.hilltopviewsonline.com/24668/viewpoints/taylor-swift-opens-up-old-wounds-as-she-reclaims-her-first-six-albums/>.
- Pianity. n.d. "Blanco Brown." *Pianity*. <https://pianity.com/blanco-brown>.
- Popular Net Worth. 2023. "Tenille Townes." *Popular Net Worth*, April 7, 2023. <https://popularnetworth.com/tenille-townes/>.
- Ray, Michael. 2022. "Carrie Underwood." *Britannica*, March 6, 2022. <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Carrie-Underwood>.
- . 2023. "Taylor Swift." *Britannica*, June 16, 2023. <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Taylor-Swift>.
- Recording Academy. 2022. "Grammy Winners 2001-2020." *Recording Academy*. <https://www.grammy.com/awards/44th-63rd-annual-grammy-awards-2021>.
- Reuter, Annie. 2021. "Blanco Brown: The Cover Story." *Sounds Like Nashville*, July 8, 2021. <https://www.soundlikenashville.com/featured/blanco-brown-cover-story/>.
- Right Net Worth. 2023. "Artists Net Worth." *Right Net Worth*. <https://rightnetworth.com/brett-young-net-worth/>.  
<https://rightnetworth.com/parker-mccollum-net-worth/>.  
<https://rightnetworth.com/riley-green-net-worth/>.
- Rock on the Net. 2022. "Billboard: 2001-2005 Year-End Chart-Toppers." *Rock on the Net*. <http://www.rockonthenet.com/archive/2001-2005/bbyearend.htm>.
- Ruhlmann, William. n.d. "Artist Biographies." *All Music*. <https://www.allmusic.com/artist/eric-church-mn0000632233/biography>.  
<https://www.allmusic.com/artist/gretchen-wilson-mn0000196976/biography?1687229493135>.
- SandBox Entertainment. 2022. "Faith Hill." *SandBox Entertainment*. <https://sandboxmgmt.com/faith-hill>.
- Sanford, K. 2021. "Martina McBride events: Know when and where she is performing with complete ticket information." *Lee Daily*, September 3, 2021. <https://leedaily.com/2021/09/03/martina-mcbride/>.
- Satlof, Mark, Jaelyn D. Carter, and Olivia Del Valle, Olivia. 2021. "Big Yellow Dog Music Congratulates Tenille Townes On CCMA Wins And More." *Shore Fire Media*, December 2, 2021. <https://shorefire.com/releases/entry/big-yellow-dog-music-congratulates-tenille-townes-on-ccma-wins-and-more>.

- Scott, Shelby. 2022. "Maren Morris Net Worth Revealed." *Outsider*, September 21, 2022. <https://outsider.com/entertainment/music/country-music/maren-morris-net-worth-revealed/>.
- Skates, Sarah. 2010. "Atlantic Signs Hunter Hayes." *Music Row*, September 14, 2010. <https://musicrow.com/2010/09/atlantic-signs-hunter-hayes/>.
- . 2011. "Brantley Gilbert Signs With Valory." *Music Row*. February 23, 2023. <https://musicrow.com/2011/02/brantley-gilbert-signs-with-valory/>.
- Song On Lyrics. n.d. "Joe Nichols Biography." *Song On Lyrics.net*. <https://lyrics.songonlyrics.net/joe-nichols-biography>.
- Sony Music Group. 2022. "Labels & Content Divisions." *Sony Music Group*. <https://www.sonymusic.com/labels/>.
- Staff Writer. 2007. "'Dancing with the Stars' champ Julianne Hough signs record deal." *The Columbus Dispatch*, December 11, 2007. <https://www.dispatch.com/story/entertainment/2007/12/11/dancing-with-stars-champ/23931068007/>.
- Stefano, Angela. 2021. "10 Things to Know About Gabby Barrett." *The Boot*, April 8, 2021. <https://theboot.com/gabby-barrett-facts/>.
- Swenson, Tricia. 2023. "Joe Nichols to play unplugged show Saturday." *Vail Daily*, January 20, 2023. <https://www.vaildaily.com/entertainment/joe-nichols-to-play-unplugged-show-saturday/>.
- Tannenbaum, Rob. 2016. "Chris Stapleton on Being the Accidental Country Star: 'The Lesson Is, Make Music That You Love'." *Billboard*, February 4, 2016. <https://www.billboard.com/music/features/chris-stapleton-grammys-on-traveller-success-6866048/>.
- . 2018. "Luke Bryan on Tragedy, Triumph and Why He May Never Write Another 'Hunting And Fishing' Song." *Billboard*, June 5, 2018. <https://www.billboard.com/music/features/luke-bryan-interview-billboard-cover-story-2018-8458596/>.
- Tingle, Lauren. 2018. "Brett Eldredge Tours the Nashville That Built Him." *CMT*, February 19, 2018. <https://www.cmt.com/news/8653g4/brett-eldredge-tours-the-nashville-that-built-him>.
- TiVo Staff. n.d. "Morgan Wallen Biography." *AllMusic*. <https://www.allmusic.com/artist/morgan-wallen-mn0003351348/biography>.
- The Vogue. n.d. "Morgan Wallen Biography." *The Vogue*, <https://thevogue.com/artists/morgan-wallen/>.

- Thompson, Gayle. 2022. "32 Years Ago: Tim McGraw Signs With Curb Records." *The Boot*, October 22, 2022. <https://theboot.com/tim-mcgraw-curb-records-signing/>.
- True, Chris. n.d. "Julianne Hough Biography." *AllMusic*. <https://www.allmusic.com/artist/julianne-hough-mn0000993271/biography>.
- Universal Music Group Nashville. 2022. "Artists." *Universal Music Group Nashville*. <https://www.umgnashville.com/our-artists/>.
- . 2013. "Jon Pardi to Release Debut Album." *Universal Music Group Nashville*, November 4, 2013. <https://www.umgnashville.com/jon-pardi-to-release-debut-album/>.
- . 2014. "Sam Hunt Signs To MCA Records Nashville." *Universal Music Group Nashville*, June 10, 2014. <https://www.umgnashville.com/sam-hunt-signs-to-mca-records-nashville/>.
- . 2014. "Universal Music Group Nashville and Show Dog Nashville Announce Restructure of Existing Joint Venture." *Universal Music Group Nashville*, November 19, 2014. <https://www.umg-nashville.com/news/universal-music-group-nashville-and-show-dog-nashville-announce-restructure-of-existing-joint-venture/>.
- Vaughn, Grace Lenehan. 2021. "10 Things You May Not Know About Carly Pearce." *Sounds Like Nashville*, February 23, 2021. <https://www.soundlikenashville.com/news/carly-pearce-things-you-may-not-know/>.
- Warner Music Nashville. 2022. "Gabby Barrett." *Gabby Barrett.com*. <https://www.gabbybarrett.com/>.
- Watts, Cindy. 2017. "BMG Buys Broken Bow Records." *The Tennessean*, January 30, 2017. <https://www.tennessean.com/story/entertainment/music/2017/01/30/bmg-buys-broken-bow-records/97244402/>.
- WCM Communications. 2023. "Country Star Zach Bryan Signs Global Publishing Deal With Warner Chappell Music." *Warner Music Group*, February 8, 2023. <https://www.wmg.com/news/country-star-zach-bryan-signs-global-publishing-deal-with-warner-chappell-music>.
- WealthyPipo. 2023. "Blanco Brown Net Worth, Salary, and Earnings 2023." *WealthyPipo*. <https://wealthypipo.com/blanco-brown-net-worth>.
- Western, Nancy. 2023. "Jimmie Allen Net Worth 2023." *CA Knowledge*, March 20, 2023. <https://caknowledge.com/jimmie-allen-net-worth/>.

Wikipedia. n.d. “Artist Biographies and Discographies.” *Wikipedia*.

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alan\\_Jackson\\_albums\\_discography](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alan_Jackson_albums_discography).  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ashley\\_McBryde\\_discography](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ashley_McBryde_discography).  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Blake\\_Shelton\\_discography](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Blake_Shelton_discography).  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Blanco\\_Brown](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Blanco_Brown).  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brad\\_Paisley\\_discography](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brad_Paisley_discography).  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brantley\\_Gilbert\\_discography](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brantley_Gilbert_discography).  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brett\\_Eldredge](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brett_Eldredge).  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brett\\_Eldredge\\_discography](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brett_Eldredge_discography).  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brett\\_Young\\_discography](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brett_Young_discography).  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carolyn\\_Dawn\\_Johnson](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carolyn_Dawn_Johnson).  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chris\\_Stapleton\\_discography](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chris_Stapleton_discography).  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Darius\\_Rucker](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Darius_Rucker).  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Darius\\_Rucker\\_discography](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Darius_Rucker_discography).  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Easton\\_Corbin](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Easton_Corbin).  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Faith\\_Hill\\_discography](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Faith_Hill_discography).  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gabby\\_Barrett](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gabby_Barrett).  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Garth\\_Brooks](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Garth_Brooks).  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Garth\\_Brooks\\_discography](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Garth_Brooks_discography).  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/George\\_Strait](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/George_Strait).  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gretchen\\_Wilson\\_discography](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gretchen_Wilson_discography).  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hunter\\_Hayes\\_discography](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hunter_Hayes_discography).  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jack\\_Ingram](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jack_Ingram).  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jake\\_Owen\\_discography](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jake_Owen_discography).  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jamie\\_O%27Neal](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jamie_O%27Neal).  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jana\\_Kramer\\_discography](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jana_Kramer_discography).  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jason\\_Michael\\_Carroll](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jason_Michael_Carroll).  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jimmie\\_Allen](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jimmie_Allen).  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joe\\_Nichols\\_discography](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joe_Nichols_discography).  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jordan\\_Davis\\_\(singer\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jordan_Davis_(singer)).  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Julianne\\_Hough](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Julianne_Hough).  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Keith\\_Urban\\_discography](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Keith_Urban_discography).  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kellie\\_Coffey](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kellie_Coffey).  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kelsea\\_Ballerini\\_discography](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kelsea_Ballerini_discography).  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kenny\\_Chesney\\_discography](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kenny_Chesney_discography).  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lainey\\_Wilson\\_discography](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lainey_Wilson_discography).  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lauren\\_Alaina\\_discography](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lauren_Alaina_discography).  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lee\\_Ann\\_Womack\\_discography](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lee_Ann_Womack_discography).  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Luke\\_Bryan\\_discography](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Luke_Bryan_discography).  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Luke\\_Combs\\_discography](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Luke_Combs_discography).  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maren\\_Morris\\_discography](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maren_Morris_discography).  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Martina\\_McBride\\_discography](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Martina_McBride_discography).  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Miranda\\_Lambert\\_discography](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Miranda_Lambert_discography).  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Parker\\_McCollum](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Parker_McCollum).  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Phil\\_Vassar](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Phil_Vassar).  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Phil\\_Vassar\\_discography](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Phil_Vassar_discography).  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Raised\\_on\\_It](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Raised_on_It).  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Riley\\_Green\\_\(singer\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Riley_Green_(singer)).  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rodney\\_Atkins\\_discography](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rodney_Atkins_discography).  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sara\\_Evans\\_discography](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sara_Evans_discography).  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sam\\_Hunt\\_discography](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sam_Hunt_discography).  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scotty\\_McCreery\\_discography](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scotty_McCreery_discography).



[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shania\\_Twain\\_discography](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shania_Twain_discography).  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Taylor\\_Swift\\_albums\\_discography](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Taylor_Swift_albums_discography).  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Taylor\\_Swift\\_masters\\_controversy](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Taylor_Swift_masters_controversy).  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tenille\\_Townes](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tenille_Townes).  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thomas\\_Rhett](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thomas_Rhett).  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tim\\_McGraw\\_discography](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tim_McGraw_discography).  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Toby\\_Keith\\_discography](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Toby_Keith_discography).  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vince\\_Gill\\_discography](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vince_Gill_discography).  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zach\\_Bryan](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zach_Bryan).

- Whitaker, Sterling. 2014. "Lee Ann Womack Signs With Sugar Hill Records." *The Boot*, April 10, 2014. <https://theboot.com/lee-ann-womack-sugar-hill-records/>.
- . 2021. "Remember when Keith Urban Released His Debut Album?" *Taste of Country*, October 19, 2021. <https://tasteofcountry.com/keith-urban-self-titled-debut-album/>.
- . 2022. "Remember When Miranda Lambert Signed Her First Record Deal?" *Taste of Country*, September 15, 2022. <https://tasteofcountry.com/miranda-lambert-first-record-deal/>.
- Winters, Kelly. n.d. "O'Neal, Jamie." *Encyclopedia.com*. <https://www.encyclopedia.com/education/news-wires-white-papers-and-books/oneal-jamie>.
- Wirt, John. 2020. "Small Town Hero: Justin Moore Scaled Country Music Heights." *The Advocate*, February 13, 2020. [https://www.theadvocate.com/baton\\_rouge/entertainment\\_life/music/small-town-hero-justin-moore-scaled-country-music-heights/article\\_2e54ad7a-49d4-11ea-b0ad-97915c77c4fd.html](https://www.theadvocate.com/baton_rouge/entertainment_life/music/small-town-hero-justin-moore-scaled-country-music-heights/article_2e54ad7a-49d4-11ea-b0ad-97915c77c4fd.html).
- Yahr, Emily. 2019. "How country singer Luke Combs took his own path and became Nashville's fastest-rising star." *The Washington Post*, February 5, 2019. [https://www.washingtonpost.com/entertainment/music/how-country-singer-luke-combs-took-his-own-path-and-became-nashvilles-fastest-rising-star/2019/02/04/b693f1aa-2649-11e9-90cd-dedb0c92dc17\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/entertainment/music/how-country-singer-luke-combs-took-his-own-path-and-became-nashvilles-fastest-rising-star/2019/02/04/b693f1aa-2649-11e9-90cd-dedb0c92dc17_story.html).
- Zaleski, Annie. 2021. "28 Years Ago: Kenny Chesney Signs His First Record Deal." *The Boot*, June 30, 2021. <https://theboot.com/kenny-chesney-first-record-deal/>.

**BRIANNA SIMON** is a Human Resource Analyst at Gulf Island in Louisiana. She earned her Master of Business Administration with Graduate Honors and Bachelor of Science in Business Administration with minors in Data Analytics and Management from Nicholls State University. She is currently an aspiring musician playing gigs in the Houma-Thibodaux, Louisiana area with a guitarist who accompanies her. Her aspirations include pursuing a career in country music which inspired the exploration of the presented research.



**JULIANN ALLEN** is an Assistant Professor of marketing at Nicholls State University. She earned a D.B.A. in marketing from Louisiana Tech University in 2020. Her research interests include consumer behavior related to digital and content marketing, materialism, and authenticity. She has published in the *Journal of Business Research*.

EN MAO is Professor of information systems and Candies 500 Endowed Professor at Nicholls State University. She earned her Ph.D. from the University of Memphis. She is also a Certified Analytics Professional from INFORMS. She taught previously at the University of Wisconsin - Milwaukee. Her current research interests include information technology acceptance, data analytics, student success, Health IT, wearables, and consumer behavior. She has published in *Information and Management*, *Data Base*, *Journal of Global Information Technology Management*, *Communications of the AIS*, *International Journal of Knowledge Management*, *Journal of Consumer Research*, and *Psychology and Marketing*.



The *Journal of the Music & Entertainment Industry Educators Association* (the *MEIEA Journal*) is published annually by MEIEA in order to increase public awareness of the music and entertainment industry and to foster music and entertainment business research and education.

The *MEIEA Journal* provides a scholarly analysis of business, legal, technological, educational, and historical trends within the music and entertainment industries and is designed as a resource for anyone currently involved or interested in these industries. Topics include issues that affect music and entertainment industry education and the music and entertainment industry such as curriculum design, pedagogy, technological innovation, intellectual property matters, industry-related legislation, arts administration, industry analysis, and historical perspectives.

Ideas and opinions expressed in the *Journal of the Music & Entertainment Industry Educators Association* do not necessarily reflect those of MEIEA. MEIEA disclaims responsibility for statements of fact or opinions expressed in individual contributions.

Permission for reprint or reproduction must be obtained in writing and the proper credit line given.

Music & Entertainment Industry Educators Association  
1900 Belmont Boulevard  
Nashville, TN 37212 U.S.A.  
[www.meiea.org](http://www.meiea.org)

The *MEIEA Journal* (ISSN: 1559-7334)  
© Copyright 2023 Music & Entertainment Industry Educators Association  
All rights reserved