

Learning the Music Industry at YouTube University

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Abstract

Have you ever watched a video on YouTube because you needed to repair a leaky pipe, fix a broken thingamajig, or learn a part for a last minute gig? It's safe to say that many people have "acquired" new skills by watching videos posted online. Long before YouTube, teachers often relied on videos as both primary and supplemental materials for their students. Now showing videos posted on platforms like YouTube have become routine practices in many classrooms.

About ten years ago, colleges and universities realized that they could expand their course offerings to anyone with an internet connection, which gave rise to the massive open online course (MOOC) movement. There has also been a growing interest in recent years in Open Educational Resources (OER), or freely available instructional materials. In many ways, YouTube already acts as an OER and serves as an informal "U.Tube." YouTube even aired a TV commercial in November 2021, "What Will You Learn?," that profiles people who used the platform to launch businesses and careers.

I often tell my music industry students that they could learn the majority of things I teach them on the internet. But I also wondered about the veracity of that statement. If you type "music publishing" into Google and limit the search to just videos, you get "about 75,300,000 results." The number jumps to over four billion when you search "all." Clearly there is no shortage of available "material." In this paper I examine select YouTube videos and other freely available sources related to the music industry as viable OER in an attempt to answer the question: is it possible for students to learn the business of music from material posted online?

Keywords: music business education, music industry education, YouTube, user generated content

The internet contains a vast amount of information about the business of music. I often tell my music industry students that they could learn the majority of things I teach them on the internet. There are countless useful bits of information available on the internet, but if a student doesn't know how to sift through and evaluate the millions of available sources, who knows what they might encounter. Various browsers and search engines yield different results, further complicating the learning process. The official launch of YouTube in December 2005 opened the floodgates for user generated content (UGC) videos about nearly everything imaginable, drastically altering the way people across the globe acquire knowledge.²

Around 2010, colleges and universities realized that they could expand their course offerings to anyone with an internet connection, which gave rise to the massive open online course movement, referred to as MOOCs.³ There has also been a growing interest in recent years in Open Educational Resources (OER's). OER's are freely available instructional materials that can also be remixed, revised, shared, and distributed with open licensing.⁴ Unfortunately, no OER's have any materials related to the business of music.

Open courseware are collections of materials for specific classes that are offered with free access from the colleges and universities that created them. Coursera offers classes related to the business of music, with numerous options, many taught via Berklee College of Music. Some of the Coursera classes have fees attached to them.⁵ Udemy offers quite a few business of music courses, including "Band as Business, Musician as Entrepreneur," a free course created by John Snyder, the founder of Artists House Music. 6 As the word massive suggests, millions of people have sat in on or participated in online classes offered through a variety of platforms. But not everyone, including our students, has the time, energy, or means to sit through hours of content in order to gain more knowledge. In the attention economy, UGC posted to YouTube provides viewers and students with a way to quickly search for answers to many questions.⁷

It's probably safe to assume that many people with internet access have acquired new skills by watching a video posted to YouTube. People can learn how to repair a leaky pipe, fix a broken thingamajig, or cram a part for a last-min-

ute gig from internet tutorials. In many ways, YouTube already acts as an OER and serves as an informal "U.Tube." On November 10, 2021 YouTube ran an ad called, "What will you learn?" that profiled a mom, an army vet, and an engineer who used the platform to learn something new and then went on to launch businesses and careers.8 At the end of the thirty second ad, the narrator's voice asks simply, "What will you learn?" The conceit of the ad is that billions of people turn to platforms like YouTube to learn something. For years, students at all grade levels have been visiting the internet and platforms like YouTube to learn (more) about the ideas and content already taught in brick and mortar classrooms or written in books. YouTube is the second most popular search engine, with 7.5 billion monthly visitors, second only to Google (YouTube's parent company), with nearly 14 billion monthly visitors. 10 In general YouTube "viewers watch over one billion hours of videos on its platform every single day."11 Music industry students are among those billions.

Given the diversity of open-access materials, is it possible for students to learn the basics about the business of music from material posted online? My answer is yes, but with caveats. Long before the existence of YouTube, teachers often relied on videos as both primary and supplemental educational materials for their students. Now showing videos posted on platforms like YouTube have become routine practice in many classrooms. In this article I examine select videos posted to YouTube that attempt to explain music publishing as viable OER's. By demonstrating how I selected and reviewed these videos, I provide practical ways teachers can incorporate informative, high-quality videos posted online into their coursework. One recommendation constructs a DIY "U.Tube" out of existing content. Overall, these suggestions offer students more meaningful experiences than they would receive by surfing YouTube's offerings independently, without the benefit of an instructor's guidance.

Choosing My Sources and Methodology

For the purposes of exploring the intersections of You-Tube videos and OER's, music publishing is a valuable case study, but other areas of the music business could certainly be explored. Issues related to music publishing are multifaceted, meaning that a discussion of music publishing inevitably involves copyright, licensing, contract law, and a host of other related topics. I found music publishing a rich site to review just what some of the so-called internet "experts" have to say about the subject. I selected videos about music publishing for several reasons. First, music publishing lies at the heart of the business of music. As entertainment lawyer Thomas R. Leavens remarked, "Music publishing is the engine that drives the music industry. There

is not a transaction involving music that does not implicate publishing in some manner." Second, the connections between publishing and copyright are integral because of the bundle of rights granted under copyright law. In order to explain music publishing, the person doing the explaining must have a very solid understanding of copyright. For this project, I closely scrutinized the ways the various authors addressed (or didn't address) the close connections between music publishing and copyright.

Music publishing is a complicated subject to teach, and often hard for students to comprehend. Several sources on music publishing served as the baseline for this research, including select chapters from How to Build a Sustainable Music Career and Collect All Revenue Streams by Emily White, and chapters from All You Need to Know about the Music Business, 10th edition, by Donald Passman, along with Music Publishing: The Complete Guide by Steve Winogradsky, and Music Money and Success: The Insider's Guide to Making Money in the Music Business, 8th edition, by Jeff and Todd Brabec.¹³ I regularly use these sources in my classes, assigning various chapters to students as homework and then pairing the reading(s) with a lecture and class discussion that typically involve showing a related YouTube video. When I encountered information in the videos selected for this article that seemed erroneous, I turned to these sources to fact check the data.

I used the rather generic phrase "music publishing" while searching for videos. By leaving my search term somewhat broad, I was able to cast a wider net in regards to content. Searching YouTube and Google on different browsers like Firefox and Safari yielded slightly different results. Although this study focuses primarily on videos posted to YouTube, I also searched Google because of the platform's dominant position on the internet. But when I narrowed my search to just videos while using Google, the results were different from a YouTube search using the same term. And oftentimes, the "videos" related to music publishing suggested by Google were typically about "how to land a publishing deal" or more often than not websites that explained music publishing that also contained some type of embedded video, regardless of the video's content.¹⁴

I selected the videos for this study based on the following criteria: 1) if the video explained music publishing, broadly speaking; 2) the video's placement in the search; 3) the view count; 4) the length of the video; and 5) if a particular company or person that posted the video had what I considered "expertise" with music publishing. YouTube users can enable search "filters" to help narrow the desired results. Although I did not incorporate these while searching, one search parameter is "duration." The lengths are "under 4 minutes," "4 - 20 minutes," and "over 20 minutes." In some instances, YouTube rewards shorter content. The

average length of the nine videos I watched was about 8 minutes, with the longest at 15:31, and the shortest coming in a 2:18. At the time of this article's publication, the view counts ranged from just over 8,560 to over 164,000. Not surprisingly, one of the oldest videos, published in 2012, had the most views.¹⁶

An analysis of how YouTube selects videos for viewers is beyond the scope of this article, but I will briefly mention some of the determining factors for YouTube's algorithms. According to Paige Cooper at Hootsuite, "The YouTube algorithm selects videos for viewers with two goals in mind: finding the right video for each viewer, and enticing them to keep watching." The YouTube "algorithm" is actually "three related but slightly different selection or discovery systems: one that selects videos for the YouTube homepage; one that ranks results for any given search; and one that selects suggested videos for viewers to watch next." Ultimately, "what affects [a] video's view count is a mix of: personalization (the viewer's history and preferences); performance (the video's success); [and] external factors (the overall audience or market)."17 The more I searched while during my research, the more refined and narrow my results became.18

Besides YouTube videos, there are many other freely available resources published on the internet related to the business of music and music publishing specifically. Companies such as CD Baby, Tunecore, Songtrust, and Symphonic Distribution offer various "survival guides" and "how-to" brochures and PDFs on their websites that touch on numerous music industry-related topics. ¹⁹ Some of these resources, like the 64-page "The Modern Guide to Music Publishing" from Songtrust, are quite good, providing detailed information written in non-legalese. As previously mentioned, if a student has never heard of these companies, they might not even know to look for these sources. For this article I focus on videos uploaded to YouTube because of the platform's position as one of the world's leading websites and search engines.

I attempted to maintain rigorous standards regarding which videos I watched throughout my research, but I hope to refine my methods as the project continues. Ultimately, I approached the selection of what videos to watch with the same mindset that might be held by a novice seeking more information about music publishing. Or to put it another way, I tried to think like one of my students while deciding which videos to watch, but always wearing my "teacher hat" when evaluating the content.

Content Analysis

For my analysis, I selected nine videos; see Table1. The race and gender of the people in the videos closely paralleled what occurs in the real world. Men narrated seven of the nine videos, or 77%, that I watched. Four videos only included or overwhelmingly showed white men; two videos featured only Black men; in one video, only a male voice could be heard. One video only featured a female voice; one video included interviews with both male-presenting and female-presenting people, all of whom appeared to be white. While my sample of videos is very small, the racial and gender analysis echoes the findings published in the June 2021 "Inclusion in the Music Business" study by the USC Annenberg Inclusion Initiative.²⁰

Large organizations and companies such as the Music Publishers Association of the UK (MPAUK), CD Baby, and Ditto Music, as well as individuals like Damien Keyes, Charles Cleyn, and Brandon Jackson produced the nine videos. I considered CD Baby, the MPAUK, and Artists House Music as experts in music publishing. The content of the videos ranged from exceptional to misleading. I defined exceptional content as a video that provided clear, factually accurate information about music publishing. Because the length (and quality) of the videos vary, I make suggestions about which content is best suited for in-class use or viewed as homework. All of the videos provide what I would characterize as an "overview" of music publishing, despite what the actual titles state. For the individuals and companies

Video Title	Company/Person	Length	Views	Date Uploaded	Subscribers (in thousands)	Total Views for Channel
Music Publishing Explained	MPAUK	9:37	164,650	8/2/2012	1.4	217,188
What Is Music Publishing?	CD Baby	6:23	134,743	3/28/2016	33.4	2,392,699
Music Publishing Explained Music Publishing 101	The Modern Musician	4:02	84,625	9/5/2018	14.1	856,106
Music Publishing Explained Different Types of Publishing Deals	KDMR Music	9:54	57,989	2/8/2019	31.0	1,127,081
The Ultimate Guide to Music Publishing	Damian Keyes	15:31	35,410	3/25/2021	186.0	12,756,450
An Introduction to Music Publishing	Artists House	8:55	25,210	3/2/2011	52.4	12,085,983
What Is Music Publishing	CD Baby Pro	2:18	22,697	5/18/2015	33.4	2,392,699
Music Publishing - Everything You Need to Know	Charles Cleyn	8:49	12,334	4/19/2020	87.9	12,204,553
What is Music Publishing? How to Claim ALL Your Royalties	Ditto Music	7:24	8,560	6/9/2021	25.5	3,004,227

Table 1. Videos about music publishing uploaded to YouTube, arranged by view count for the selected video. All view counts as of June 23, 2022.

that uploaded the content, these videos served numerous purposes: first, as a way to "teach" their viewers or subscribers about music publishing; second, to demonstrate the "authority" and expertise of the creator or organization; and third, perhaps most importantly, some of these videos acted as long-form commercials to advertise all the other services that you could purchase from the authors.

Two music publishing videos repeatedly placed at the top of my search: "Music Publishing Explained | Music Publishing 101" posted by The Modern Musician, and "The Ultimate Guide to Music Publishing" by Damian Keyes. The Modern Musician, "a collective informative video channel for musicians to learn how the music industry works and how to earn money," began uploading content in 2014.21 This channel has a comparatively small number of subscribers, with just over 14,000, and a total of 856,106 views for all of their videos. The Modern Musician is curated by staff who work at ManageAdMusic, "a boutique one-stop shop for collecting performance royalties on music played in commercials."22 Damian Keyes has a "verified" or an "official channel of a creator." "Verified" YouTube channels must have 100,000 subscribers. Keyes' channel has 186,000 subscribers, and a total of over 12,750,000 views for all his videos. The description of his channel states that he provides "Musician/Business/Social Media Advice! [and] Daily tips for bands and musicians on how to have a long-term career in the music business." Neither of these two specific videos have the most views of the nine I watched. But Keyes is what Ari Herstand would call a "constant creator," someone who regularly posts to their channel.²³ The Modern Musician hasn't posted any content to YouTube since early 2021. Their music publishing video, however, is just over four minutes long. Based on Cooper's breakdown of how the YouTube algorithm works—the viewer's history and preferences; the video's success; and the overall audience—each of the videos by Keyes and The Modern Musician fit within the "expected" search results.

"Music Publishing Explained" by the MPAUK is a highly-produced video that utilizes interviews with numerous people, including several women, graphics, and background music. This nine-minute video covers quite a range of topics including the publisher-songwriter relationship, what publisher's do for a writer, PROs, synch rights, publishing and classical music (the only video that does so), and the impact of the internet and technology on music publishing, stating that "The technology allows us to collect income from the most obscure places." Considering the ever-increasing placements of music on digital platforms across the globe, this last point is particularly prescient. Oddly, this video never discusses copyright and only mentions "the mechanical right" in passing. Overall, the MPAUK video acts as a long-form commercial for the organization, and while

it's informative, it's content that educators would not likely use as a primary source in the classroom.

"What Is Music Publishing?" produced by CD Baby is a video slightly over six minutes that touches on numerous publishing concepts without providing much detail. Of course, CD Baby wants musicians to sign up for their publishing services provided by CD Baby Pro. The video relies on a voiceover and lots of graphics and text, and concludes with three "key takeaways." First, publishers should know their six exclusive rights; second, protect your rights through agreements, and register the works with PROs; and finally, maximize your publishing revenue through creative placements and making sure you're collecting from all sources. This video by CD Baby provides a brief summary of music publishing and is a good tool to use in a classroom because a knowledgeable teacher will fill in the gaps. The content for the CD Baby Pro video is comparable to the CD Baby video. But as mentioned at the outset of this article, a student or novice viewing these videos might not realize that any information is missing. I also found it odd that neither of the CD Baby publishing videos appeared in the top ten when searching YouTube, especially considering that CD Baby Pro acts as one of the largest "publishers" for DIY musicians who use the company's distribution services. In short, I had to specifically search for this content.

"Music Publishing Explained | Music Publishing 101" by The Modern Musician was one of the highest placed videos when I searched YouTube. The four-minute video utilizes a voiceover by a female, the only video that does so, excellent graphics, and jaunty background music. Within the video's first ten seconds, the voiceover proclaims, "First you need to understand music copyright and publishing. And it's a tough nut to crack. Copyright is the most important asset you have as a musician." This video goes on to address primarily the different types of publishers (administrators, independents, and major publishers), and what publishers do such as works registration, issuing licenses, royalty collection and various creative matters. This video, because of its brevity and tightly-focused content, provides a good overview of music publishing, and is one that I often use as a resource during class meetings.

Brandon Jackson from KDMR, or "Keep Dreaming, Make Reality," produced "Music Publishing Explained | Different Types of Publishing Deals." Jackson is one of two Black men featured in the videos I watched. The video, impressively done in one take, shows Jackson casually speaking into the camera for nearly ten minutes, and only utilizes graphics at the end. The video's length allows Jackson time to go in-depth about numerous topics related to music publishing, including advances, a topic that most of the other videos don't cover. At one point, he soberly states, "if the [publishing] deal looks too good to be true, it probably is."

This video offers a very solid overview of music publishing, allowing a teacher plenty of space to elaborate on what Jackson covers.

"The Ultimate Guide to Music Publishing" by Damian Keyes is the longest video I watched, fifteen-and-a-half minutes long, although the last few minutes feature him advertising his numerous other services. The 2021 video, which is a bit "jumpy" in terms of editing (but typical for "constant creators"), primarily shows Keyes talking, while occasionally utilizing graphics and stock video footage. The video's production will likely appeal to students because they are used to viewing content made in this style. Overall, it's a quality production, and Keyes covers many current topics related to publishing like artists selling their catalogs and the numerous ways a songwriter might land a publishing deal. Oddly, considering the length of the video, Keyes barely discusses copyright or licensing. For educators who don't want to use up valuable classroom time, I suggest pairing either of the videos by Jackson or Keyes (or most of the videos discussed here) along with a reading from one of the print sources mentioned above as a homework assignment.

"An Introduction to Music Publishing" uploaded in March 2011 by Artists House Music provides the best overall breakdown of the subject. This video is an excerpt from the Udemy "Band as Business, Musician as Entrepreneur" course. George Howard, from Berklee College of Music, does the majority of talking, but the video includes footage of entertainment lawyer Donald Passman. The overall organization and content covered in the video is outstanding. The video makes it clear what is "basic" information, such as whenever a song is "fixed" in a tangible medium a copyright is generated and that "publishing is concerned with the registration, exploitation, and collection of this copyright."24 As well as the "key points" of music publishing, including the different types of royalties. Near the end of the nearly-nine-minute video, a graphic on the screen states, "even as the business changes, publishing will be at the center; you must understand publishing." Some viewers, however, may get turned off by the extremely dated quality of the video (it looks like a VHS tape uploaded to YouTube). And like the CD Baby videos, I had to specifically search for this content. Some educators might not want to allot nine minutes (or longer) of precious class time to showing a video. So, like the videos by Jackson and Keyes, teachers could pair the Artists House video with a reading as homework to help reinforce concepts and ideas about music publishing.

"What is Music Publishing? | How to Claim ALL Your Royalties" uploaded by Ditto Music in June 2021 is the most recent video I watched. This was also the only other video hosted by a person of color. Similarly to the videos posted by CD Baby, Ditto *really* wants viewers to sign up

for their publishing services. Ditto's video didn't appear when I searched YouTube, but it appeared near the top of the search results when I searched Google using the term "music publishing." The seven-minute video provided very good information, delivered with a very chill vibe.

Charles Cleyn posted "Music Publishing - Everything You Need to Know." The no frills video primarily shows Cleyn speaking into the camera from a home studio. Cleyn has the second highest subscriber count, nearly 88,000, for the channels I researched, and his videos have collectively been viewed nearly 11 million times. Like Keyes, he's a constant creator. The most useful part of Cleyn's video was when he discussed songwriting advances and that songwriters don't receive writers royalties until their songs recoup. Unfortunately, portions of the content in Cleyn's video was wrong and misleading, particularly his discussions about PROs and synch licensing.

Conclusion

According to Google, its "mission is to organize the world's information and make it universally accessible and useful."²⁵ On its surface, this statement sounds wonderful. But Google also commodifies and optimizes results. Savvy YouTube content creators understand how to "game" the algorithm to ensure that their videos appear at the top of a given search. And as previously mentioned, "An Introduction to Music Publishing" uploaded by Artists House Music, the video that I felt included the best information, was nowhere near the top of the search results.

So why should educators care about content related to the music industry posted to YouTube? First, our students are already going there for information, and have likely been doing so long before they ever stepped into our classrooms. And they will continue to do so. Second, many of the music industry videos I've watched on YouTube are very good, but some of them also provide misleading or incorrect information. As I've already discussed, YouTube's algorithm suggests videos based on numerous criteria, and accuracy of information is not one of them. So here's what I've been doing, and maybe some of you already do this, too. I created a music industry YouTube playlist. Basically, it's a curated playlist of the videos that I use in my classes that cover topics such as copyright, music publishing, PROs, music marketing, and recording contracts.²⁶ My goal is to compile a comprehensive playlist of video tutorials related to numerous topics about the business of music from what I consider reliable sources. In essence, I'm hoping to curate my own open courseware using YouTube's freely accessible material. Artists House Music's YouTube channel already includes dozens of informative videos related to the music industry. Unfortunately, Artists House hasn't posted a video in at least five years, and much of their content is now dated.²⁷ An organization like MEIEA, with its broad network of music industry educators and professionals, is poised to fill that void and create and curate a very robust list of "open-access," online video resources.²⁸

An alternative to what I proposed above combines digital literacy, critical thinking, and music industry knowledge. Instead of "experts" curating a list, students could seek out videos and then evaluate them based on numerous criteria such as accuracy of information, production value, and length. For example, a teacher might assign a reading on a specific music industry topic, and using that chapter as their baseline, students are then asked to find and grade/rank three to five videos. This process could be repeated throughout a semester (or longer), ultimately generating a robust list of videos that students or anyone could return to in the future. Or better yet, students could create their own brief videos about specific music industry-related topics.

To answer my own research question: is it possible for students to learn the business of music from material posted online? Of course, the answer is yes, but with a qualification. First, the amount of available information is overwhelming, so where does a novice begin? Second, if a viewer has questions related to the video's content, there is often no one to ask or the viewer comments go unanswered. Navigating the shifting terrain of the music industry requires a guide. I feel that one of my jobs as a music and entertainment industry educator is to provide students with high quality resources both in and outside of the classroom. And in some cases, that includes directing them towards prescreened content posted to YouTube.

Endnotes

- I would like to thank Catherine Hughes for reading through and providing helpful comments on drafts of this article.
- 2. Paige Leskin, "YouTube is 15 years old. Here's a Timeline of How YouTube was Founded, Its Rise to Video Behemoth, and its Biggest Controversies Along [the] Way," *Business Insider*, updated May 30, 2020, https://www.businessinsider.com/history-of-youtube-in-photos-2015-10.
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- at the University of Minnesota, see https://open.umn.edu/opentextbooks. The OER Commons is a public digital library of open educational resources, searchable by subject and education level, see https://www.oercommons.org/. OpenStax, based at Rice University in Houston, offers peer-reviewed, openly licensed textbooks in multiple subject areas, which are available in free digital formats and for a low cost in print, see https://openstax.org. All accessed June 1, 2022.
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- 13. Emily White, How to Build a Sustainable Music Career and Collect All Revenue Streams (Monee, Illinois: 9GiantStepsBooks, 2020); Donald Passman, All You Need to Know about the Music Business, 10th edition (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2019); Steve Winogradsky, Music Publishing: The Complete Guide (Van Nuys, California: Alfred Publishing Company, 2019); Jeff and Todd Brabec, Music Money and Success: The Insider's Guide to Making Money in the Music Business, 8th edition (New York: Schirmer Trade Books, 2018).

- 14. Other similar studies might also include searches on video-hosting platforms such as Vimeo and Edutopia.
- 15. I considered a company like CD Baby or a lawyer like George Howard as an expert in music publishing.
- 16. The content for this video, posted by the Music Publishers Association of the UK (MPAUK), is still relevant despite being ten years old.
- 17. Paige Cooper, "How the YouTube Algorithm Works in 2022: The Complete Guide," June 21, 2021, https://blog.hootsuite.com/how-the-youtube-algorithm-works/.
- 18. One suggestion to counter the effect of continually narrowing of search results would be to use multiple browsers on different computers (laptops, desktops, and mobile devices) from different locations (home, school, office, café, etc.).
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- 26. Christopher M. Reali, "Videos About the Business of Music," *YouTube*, https://www.youtube.com/play-list?list=PLaL1450Tj5Aimnh2JQlqyaocdAaj-D1-k.
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