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CD Project Guide

Greetings, my name is Dana Tucker and I am the owner of D & L Recording Studio LLC, located in Honaker Virginia. Recording, mixing, mastering and releasing an CD, CD or EP can be overwhelming unless you separate the process into steps, and that's my job.

I have never been one to stand still while others looked as if they were struggling. Even as a young adult I had a eagerness to help where I could, regardless of what the task was. That's how I got into the audio profession.

Pastor Beasley asked for volunteers to do a tape ministry for our members of Cocoa Baptist Church who were to ill to attend services. No adults offered to help so myself and my friend answered that call at the ripe old age of 15. Our recording gear consisted of a Radio Shack tape recorder and a Shure High Ball dynamic microphone. That was back in 1976 and I still use that very mic today.

EPs are good because they're not too time-consuming. Yet they still allow you to release a batch of new music to fans. Singles are good because you can consistently release music, keeping your name in front of people. They also work well in tandem with an CD or EP. You can release them ahead of the CD or EP to build excitement.

CDs are kind of the gold standard when it comes to releasing music. You put a lot of work, time, and possibly money into a family of songs. And when you're done, the rewarding feeling you get is so deep. Fans also recognize how much effort you put into it and appreciate it more. A CD is your chance to say what you want to say, all at once.

Writing the songs for an CD can happen in many different ways. Some songwriters set out to say something intentional with an CD. Then they write the songs with that in mind. However you go about it, the main question to ask yourself is "Do these songs belong together?"

The point of creating an CD is about more than just making great songs. It's about what they say as a whole, thematically and musically. As for how many songs CDs usually have on them, it's normally between 10–13 songs. Once you've got your songs, it's time to make a plan.

To successfully create and release an CD, you need a plan. You can't just start the project and expect things to work themselves out. So here are the essential parts of a good CD creation plan.

Figure Out Your Budget

You don't want to reach the end of one stage only to realize you don't have the money for the next. So even before you start recording, figure out your budget based on how many songs will be on the CD. When making your budget, here are some questions to ask yourself:

- Are you going to hire musicians or play all the parts yourself?
- Do you want a producer or will you produce it yourself?
- Will you be mixing the songs, or will you hire someone else?
- Who will do the mastering?
- Are you going to hire an artist to create the CD artwork or make it yourself?
- How much will distribution cost?
- Do you plan to spend money on promotion? If so, how much?

I hope you see why making a budget is important. You need to calculate how much money the CD will cost before you even start.

Find a Recording Space

Finding a recording space is easier than it's ever been. And that's great news for you. I've recorded CDs in bedrooms, basements, a garage, and a walk-in closet. So I know first-hand how to work with what you have. But as part of your plan, you need to decide on a place that you know will work. If you are a Christian Group, I have found that most Churches, the Church you belong to, will often grant you permission to record in their facilities as they already know you.

Set a Timeline and Schedule

You need to plan out how long the CD will take to make. This can be difficult to estimate, but again, that is really my job and we will discuss this in detail before we start your project. A general rule to follow is to finish each stage before you move onto the next and this will fall into three categories.

1. Finish writing all the songs before you start recording.
2. Finish recording and editing before you start the mixing process.
3. Finish mixing before mastering.

So going into the recording process, you should have finished writing the songs and selected only the best ones, and have practiced them many times. Then you need to figure out how long it takes you to fully record a song. Do you want to record multiple songs at once? After you have a general timeline, set up a schedule. If you know you'll have three free nights a week, put "Record CD" in your calendar, and stick to it. You can always adjust the timeline and schedule, but having a basic plan will really help.

Register Your Songs for Royalties

The first thing you need to do is register your songs with a few different companies so you get paid royalties if you want to allow others to use your music for their projects. For songwriting royalties, sign up with a publishing rights organization (PRO).

In the United States, that would be BMI, ASCAP, or SESAC. In Canada, it's SOCAN. It's free to sign up, so it's free money you could be missing out on. To collect publishing royalties, sign up with a publishing admin company like Songtrust. Some digital distributors, like CD Baby and Tunecore, offer publishing admin services as add-ons. I will be using CD Baby unless you have made other arrangements.

And to collect mechanical royalties, register your songs with SoundExchange. It's a very time-consuming process, but it's worth it. They're the only company in the U.S. who collects mechanical royalties.

Create the CD Cover

You also need to think about presenting your CD to the public. The first impression many people get is the CD cover or sleeve. If you've budgeted for someone to create the CD artwork, fantastic. Myself, I find it much easier as well as more personal, if someone in the group takes some pictures and then decide which ones they would like to use. I will explain the process with you as far as the resolution and file extension it needs to be in.

Distribute Your Music

Once the CD cover is done, it's time to pick a distribution company. These companies send your music to Spotify, Apple Music, TikTok, and more. You should upload and schedule your CD for distribution 2–4 weeks before the release date. This gives the distributor time to review and approve it so it hits stores on time. Distributors have different options and features. I will be using CD Baby for this project unless you have made other arrangements.

Create a Promotion Plan

There are so many ways to do music promotion, so let me just cover the basics. Here's what should be a part of your music marketing plan:

- ✧ A music video, even if it's shot on your smartphone or it's a lyric video.
- ✧ Create a website and update it to match the style of the CD artwork.
- ✧ Hire a photographer or get a friend with a nice smartphone to take press photos, then put them on your site.
- ✧ Write a group or artist bio.

- ✧ Start an email list and put a signup form on your site's homepage.
- ✧ Create an electronic press kit. (EPK)
- ✧ Get your songs on Spotify playlists, blogs, and YouTube channels.

Even if you don't like marketing, it really helps to put some thought into your promotion plan.

Conclusion

Follow these steps and tips, and you can totally create an CD you're proud of. The trick is to take it one step at a time. This helps you fight that feeling of being overwhelm. I've released multiple CDs, and these things are what I've found to be true.

The last thing I want to touch in is communication. Without proper communication, everything mentioned above means absolutely nothing. If I take on your project, you have my word that it will be my top priority and nothing will be done without you being 100% involved!

You will never have to worry about the state of your project because you will be informed of every stage we are in. If you email, text or call me, you will be contacted back during my normal business hours which consist of 1am to 5pm EST Monday through Saturday. So if you can't sleep and send me a text at 2am concerning your project, expect to get a call around 2:05am.

Now that you know the commitment I provide to my clients, I expect the same in return. If I send you a email, leave a voice mail or send you a text between 9am and 4pm EST, I expect to receive an answer before close of business the following day. If I need additional information, that means I am at a point that without receiving it, the project could be placed on hold in till I receive it.

So the very first thing we need to do is meet and go over the details of your project. Your project may not need everything mentioned in this guide and if it's not needed, then we simply move on to the next step. I use Zoom for our initial meeting for two reasons.

1. It will allow me to record our conversation so we can refer back to it as your project progresses.
2. It is much easier to set a time and date that we can meet.

Please do not hesitate to contact me with any questions you may have concerning the information provided in this CD Project Guide.

Sincerely, *Dana Tucker*