



LABEL STANDARD RELEASE CYCLE UPDATE 2026

An in-depth breakdown of a full release from prior to distribution - post release.

In today's fast-moving music landscape, having a clear and structured release plan is essential to maximise impact and build long-term success. While every artist's journey is different, this guide outlines a label-standard release framework - a baseline structure designed to help AU/NZ artists navigate the ever-evolving social, digital, and media landscape effectively.

This plan maps out key priorities from the moment your track is uploaded to a distributor through to release day and beyond. It's designed for artists who want to create momentum, grow demand for their catalogue, and build a sustainable artist career.

In 2026, successful music releases are powered by three key connection points: Social, Digital, and Media. Together, these pillars form your Communication Plan: the core of audience discovery and fan engagement.

Let's start by breaking down the core fundamental pillars of communications.

SOCIAL: The Heart of Audience Connection

Your social platforms are your most direct line to your audience - not just for content distribution, but for storytelling, community, and identity. A strong social strategy focuses on clarity: knowing *who* you're speaking to and *why* they connect with you.

When shaping your approach, consider:

- Listener Behaviour: How does your audience actually use the platforms you're active on?
- Discovery Journey: What does it look like for a potential fan to find and fall in love with your music?
- Artist Strengths & Gaps: What makes you stand out, and where can you sharpen your communication?

The goal isn't just to post - it's to connect. Authentic, consistent engagement drives discovery, and discovery builds loyal fans.

Community & Audience Growth:

For 2026, the artists who thrive focus on building a direct relationship with their audience, not just collecting followers. A core goal for each single and release should be to develop a database of engaged fans:

- Create a Google Form or landing page to collect emails from super-engaged audience members.

- Share the link on stories or posts monthly, offering incentives like exclusive content, sneak peeks, or personal narratives.
- Treat this group as your superfans - the foundation of long-term engagement.

Use email tools like Mailchimp, Substack, or similar to connect directly. Make sure your strategy spans social media, live shows, and other community growth tactics, so your database grows consistently.

DIGITAL: Streamlined Discovery and Data-Driven Growth

Your digital strategy ensures the journey from social interaction to streaming platform is smooth and intentional. That includes optimising your artist profiles, feeding platforms with accurate metadata and visuals, and using targeted digital promotion when appropriate.

For independent artists, budget clarity is key before investing in ads. Paid campaigns can enhance reach, but only when the groundwork (social connection, organic engagement, audience clarity) is already strong.

Make data your ally: analyse where your listeners come from, how they engage, and use those insights to refine every future release.

MEDIA: Building Awareness Through Third-Party Amplifiers

Media - from playlisting and blogs to radio and press, can extend your reach and validate your story. But it's important to view it as supplementary, not foundational.

Media can spark new discovery, but the most valuable audience growth still comes from direct artist-fan relationships built through your own channels. Treat media as the *bonus layer* that amplifies a strategy already working.

The 5-Week Release Cycle

Your release timeline starts five weeks before release day. Uploading to your distributor 4–6 weeks in advance ensures you're eligible for editorial playlist consideration and have enough time to roll out your campaign smoothly. Below is the base level campaign broken into specific actions that is applicable for singles, EP or album releases, and although each campaign will have its own look and feel this is the bare minimum.

5 WEEKS OUT - Setup Week

- Finalise mastering (WAV, MP3, AIF)
- Prepare clean edits (if needed).
Clean edit refers to a version of the song that is not explicit. This is not vital, but always good to have, particularly if radio asks for it.
- Ensure all creative assets (cover art, press photos, tiles, video content) are ready.
Having all content ready in advance is vital to save time + ensures that you are not spending too much

time in areas that don't require it.

- Refresh or Update all Digital Streaming Platforms and social profiles.
Biography, avatar image, featured or pinned content, ensure all links work
- Build / update your media contact list [online, radio, streaming].
We suggest having an excel / google sheet split into 3x tabs; online, radio, streaming. These should house all contacts that you'll be contacting over the course of the campaign. Having this done during set up is vital, as the longest part of media servicing is finding the contacts, once you have got them in a database the work load is halved.
- Write your Press Release.
Please, if you do use chat GPT or another AI format, only use it as a base and structure, you should then be re-writing it in more of a narrative driven way. AI writing can be very noticeable.
- Write your Spotify for Artists submission pitch.
Summary of your Press release that is one paragraph and sits under 500 total characters.

4 WEEKS OUT - Upload + Initial Pitching to Digital Stores and Media_

- Upload to your distribution service.
- Upload to Triple J Unearthed. [AU /NZ Artists only]
Uploading to unearthed early ensures you manage their upload times. In an ideal world you'd want your single to be live on the platform prior to release day, as it allows time to meaningfully service the release to the station with a link that is relevant to them.
- Upload private SoundCloud/DISCO links.
This is your main listening link. This is the link that you will be using to pitch to all relevant media outlets and industry. Media don't generally like to receive dropbox, google drive or WeTransfer files as they do not operate like streaming services. If they listen through their phone and the screensaver goes dark, the music will stop. SoundCloud / DISCO allows for that, while also giving the media the opportunity to embed those links into their blog.
- Register the release with APRA/AMCOS for royalties. [AU /NZ Artists only]
This can be done post release, but we suggest doing it early as it allows you to get it out of the way. For more information on monetisation of your project please read our [Understanding Finances article here](#)
- Submit to AMRAP for community radio and set for release day.
The Australian Music Radio Airplay Project (AMRAP) is a free, online platform for Australian community radio stations to discover and download new Australian music, and for musicians to promote their work to a national audience. It helps community broadcasters meet Australian music airplay quotas and provides artists with opportunities for airplay, tracking, and potential royalties.

- Schedule All social media content for the entire campaign.
You have the content ready, at this point you should have access to the pre save link (which turns into your buy link on release day. This means you have everything you need to schedule every single bit of content you have over the course of the entire campaign.

Scheduling is by far the biggest time saver as it allows you to forget about content + focus on what's really important, which is talking directly to your audience.

- Facebook and Instagram can be scheduled directly via Meta business suite or in app directly.
- TikTok can be scheduled on TikTok Studio or on desktop.
- Youtube can be scheduled on Youtube studio on phone or desktop.

- Distributor to do initial pitch to Digital Streaming Platforms.
You won't need to worry about this as distribution does this on your behalf.
- Initial pitch to all media (excluding independent playlists).
As soon as your song becomes available in the back end of your Spotify For Artist Portal, you'll be able to submit it for playlisting through the 'Upcoming Tab'. You just need to fill in the form and copy and paste the write up you already wrote last week.

*Following that, we recommend pitching to all media outlets excluding playlists. There is no need to pitch for playlisting as they require the song to be live on Spotify / Youtube before they add it.
Pitch to: all online outlets, digital, community radio.*

For more information on online media, please see here for our [Blogs article](#).

For community radio stations they are quite easy to find, just google CBAA radio stations and you will literally get a list and a way to contact them directly. AMRAP will then be used as a follow up when the release goes live.

For more information on radio stations please read our [The State of AU /NZ Radio article here](#)

3 WEEKS OUT - Social & Digital Strategy Week.

- Begin social outreach and connect with niche audience accounts.
At this stage your content is scheduled, so your main focus should be on developing deeper connection and discovery with audiences that don't know who you are.
- 1. Identify Your Niche: Create a list of 3–5 reference songs for each single you've released from artists you genuinely feel share a similar audience to yours.*
 - 2. Find Your People: Go through the audio pages, Shorts, and Reels for those popular, similar songs. Look for people who are consistently engaged in that niche. Save those usernames.*
 - 3. Engage: Spend 10-15 minutes daily, at least three days a week, commenting, liking, and communicating with the people in that database.*

Crucially, do not spam or promote yourself.

Generate meaningful discussions within your niche. This engagement is the work. It provides critical data to the platform about your target audience, helping your content surface in the right feeds. More importantly, it's a pure connection point for generating discovery over a sustained period. You are humanising your brand and creating a loyal following invested in your journey, and also creating repeat exposure on multiple features in one platform.

For more information on social strategy please read our [An Actual Content Strategy article here](#).

2 WEEKS OUT - Refine / Repurpose + Social Announce Week

- Review feedback and traction from early pitches.
At this point, we should have an understanding of which media outlets are replying and giving you feedback, conversely whether they plan on featuring the release on their site / station or not. With that in mind we still have two weeks to either double down on what's working or adjust based on what isn't. Any media outlet that has responded regardless of reply needs to get a response from you directly.
- Announce your release on socials with strong storytelling and visuals.
Your scheduled posts should begin to roll out at this point. Ensure all comments are replied to and you are re-sharing via stories

RELEASE WEEK + BEYOND - Activation + Momentum

- Share and amplify any media coverage.
- Pitch to indie user playlists.
*For more information on why independent playlist pitching is important or algorithmic discovery read our [Getting Playlists article here](#).
It's important to note the focus with independent playlist pitching should not be maximising streams (you are simply not getting discovered there) its to expose the song to a group of people that all share a similar taste profile. That is clear direct data to spotify around who your audience is based on who you expose the song to.*

Stagger your pitching over weeks to ensure that data is spread over time.
- Update your distributor with early digital/social metrics.
- Run targeted digital ads if relevant.
This is only applicable if you have a budget. We would suggest running ads that lead directly to the streaming platform, using your best performing organic social posts as they are already proven to work.
- Follow up with all media and industry contacts using live links.
All the media you have pitched to should get a follow up on release day with the live link as a secondary push for placement. You do not need to do this for community radio as AMRAP does this for you.

- Keep engaging your audience, post reactions, share UGC, and celebrate milestones.

REPEAT AND STREAMLINE EVERY RELEASE.

Community & Email Growth: 3-Month Roadmap.

Now you are across the standard release cycle, we also feel it's important to cover how we are getting fans to opt in to deeper access. Below is a broken down 3 month roadmap to begin developing your email database.

Month 1 - Foundation:

- Launch email sign-up landing page.
- Incentivise with a freebie (download, behind-the-scenes content, etc.).
- Push sign-up links daily on socials.
- Goal: 100 subscribers.

Month 2 - Engagement:

- Onboard sequence: 3 emails (welcome, intro, exclusive content).
- Monthly newsletter + 1 bonus email.
- Tag sign-ups by channel (IG, TikTok, live).

Month 3 - Acceleration:

- Run an email-first exclusive drop (demo, presave, or discount).
- Test collaboration campaigns with other artists.
- Offer referral incentives ("share with 2 friends").

Psychological levers to drive engagement:

- FOMO: "First 50 subscribers get early access."
- VIP: "Be part of my inner circle."
- Intimacy: "Emails are where I share the real me."
- Scarcity: "Exclusive content only available via email."

A disciplined release cycle combined with community-first engagement doesn't just build awareness, it builds a career. By prioritising authentic connection (Social), data-driven growth (Digital), strategic amplification (Media), and a direct audience pipeline (Community/Email), artists can ensure that every release strengthens their audience and their project.

In 2026, the artists who win are the ones who plan, connect, and cultivate their own superfan community.