



The Audience Is Their Own Tastemaker

Personalisation of music means that artists don't need tastemakers to initiate discovery.

The age of the gatekeeper is not just declining; it has effectively collapsed. For decades, the trajectory of a musical career was dictated by a handful of individuals in windowless rooms at radio stations and television networks. If your music video wasn't on MTV or rotation on BBC Radio 1B-list, you didn't exist in the cultural consciousness.

Today, the power has shifted from the outlets to the bedroom. The modern listener does not need to wait to be told what is "cool" by a taste maker. Through sophisticated algorithms and peer-to-peer amplification, the audience has become its own tastemaker, and that's a good thing.

"The issue in the 80s, 90s and 00s for independent artists was all about access to the audience. Artists needed industry and media to amplify them into cultural relevance, now we have it, and artists are still complaining..The issue in the current market is discovery in saturated ecosystems, and most acts and teams are still trying to operate in a world that doesn't exist. The reality is that it is 1000% times easier to develop an artist now with the access available, as opposed to hoping that triple j or NOVA will add a record." - Anthony Agostino (Director Cartel Australia)

In the Australian market, the numbers are irrefutable. Recent 2026 data indicates that 89–91% of music listenership* in the country is funnelled through Spotify. (Artists can hate it all they want, but that's a fact) This near-monopoly on attention means that Spotify's internal mechanics now carry more weight than every traditional media outlet combined.

Discovery is no longer an active hunt; it is a passive, hyper-personalised delivery service. Consider these global benchmarks:

45% of all artist discovery now originates from "Made for You" algorithmic playlists.

There is a staggering 73% probability that when a user opens the app, their first port of call is a variation of their 'Daily Mix*' or 'Daylist' as it is personalised to them.

These features are curated based on a user's unique Taste Profile, which is a digital fingerprint of every skip, save, and repeat. When nearly three-quarters of your potential audience is listening to a feed designed specifically for them, the "tastemaker" who tries to broadcast one song to a million people becomes an obsolete relic. In fact, a 2026 report by a former Spotify executive highlighted a "one-way valve" effect where algorithms, by prioritising global English-language data, have actually caused the local stream share of Australian artists to drop by nearly 30% since 2021. The machine doesn't care about your local radio host; it cares about what the data says the listener wants next.

While Spotify manages the consumption, platforms like TikTok and Instagram have revolutionised the initial spark of discovery. The era of the high-budget music video on MTV has been replaced by User-Generated Content (UGC).

By 2026, short-form video drives 51% of music discovery for the under-24 demographic. However, the discovery is now Context First. Fans don't just want to hear a song; they want to use it. UGC powers 80% of discoveries across these fragmented platforms. A fan creates a reaction video or a "fan edit," the algorithm identifies the sub-culture that resonates with that specific visual context, and your catalogue is amplified across millions of feeds. This creates a "signal over noise" effect where the audience (not a label rep, publicist or manager) is the one seeding the music.

The decline of traditional media is not just anecdotal; it is statistical. In the early 2000s, a Power Play on radio could break an artist overnight. By 2026, terrestrial radio and networks like MTV have seen a terminal drop in their influence over music discovery.

Once the primary engine of discovery, radio's local content consumption in Australia fell by 31% between 2021 and 2025. In the current market, radio is increasingly viewed as a background utility for weather and traffic, while streaming services have turned discovery into a global contest that bypasses local DJs entirely.

MTV & Video Networks: The transition from music discovery to reality-based entertainment is total. The "music video premiere" has been replaced by the YouTube "Premiere" and the TikTok "Sound" launch. The saturation of the market with over 150,000 tracks uploaded to streaming services every single day, means that the human ear can no longer act as the sole filter. Data-driven personalisation is the only filter that can scale at this speed.

The conclusion for the modern artist is firm: Stop chasing the third-party endorsement. Spending your energy, budget, and mental health trying to secure a radio play or a tastemaker blog post is a legacy strategy for a world that no longer exists. Third-party endorsements often result in passive play, where a listener hears your song because it was forced upon them (still good as a touch point), but has no intention of following you, buying a ticket, or joining your ecosystem.

The goal is to go direct-to-listener. By understanding the algorithm, nurturing your own social community, and creating content that encourages participation through UGC, you trigger the "personalisation" engines of the world's largest streaming platforms.

The audience is already curating their own world. Your job is not to find a gatekeeper to let you in; it is to make sure you are the answer to the audience's own search for something real. Focus on the listener, build your own ecosystem, and let the algorithm do the heavy lifting.