



## CHAPTER 29

# Alternative Ways Your Songs Can Make Money

## I Want My Songs on TV and in the Movies

### HOT TIP



How does one work these pitches? Again, the trades are your friends. In the case of movies and television, you need to read the *Hollywood Reporter* and *Daily Variety*. They are published every day. Once a week the *Hollywood Reporter* lists the TV and film productions that are going on, with the telephone numbers and other information. The phone numbers are your key.

Cold calling is always hard to do, but it's part of the game. Call and ask for the producer, or for the music coordinator's or music supervisor's number. Also ask the person who answers the phone if they know whether the producer is looking for original songs for the movie or show. Sometimes they won't know, but sometimes they will put you through to the producer's office. Sometimes they will put you through to the music coordinator or supervisor. Sometimes they haven't even thought about music yet—music comes at the very end of a film or TV production. Sometimes they will tell you to call back.

In all of these instances, you break out your phone file and begin your "File." Right now.





You might make 20 calls and get nowhere at all. That's today. Next Thursday, the first call you may hear could be, "Hey, I need a song about a 'jukebox that lives in the Rock 'n' Roll Hall of Fame!' I need it last week, what do you have for me?" Or, "I need a 'pedestal' love song, a power ballad to go over the end credits—get it to me in one week!" Cool.

By reading the trades every day, you will begin to pick up more information about movies and TV shows, who is involved in making them, and who is handling the music. Then it really isn't hard to track down those companies or individuals.

One thing you should know is this: many movie and television people on the production side don't know jack about music. For the most part, they give it a low place on the totem pole of production value, and they are cheap about it. Again, they don't have a clue about good songs or bad songs or so-so songs or real junk. It's the music supervisors, especially with television, who really have the influence and have convinced the production people that showcasing cutting-edge artists and bands in the soundtracks can be a plus.

Pitching songs to movie and television people is a maddening process, but it can pay off big! For instance, I made a deal for an original song in a low-budget movie. The licensing was well under a thousand dollars. The song had three writers, and after all the splits, there was no real money; it just covered my phone bill. The writers were not happy with me. When the movie came out, I had to see it three times before I could ID and hear about 15 seconds of the song.

Now comes the luck of the draw, just because we went for it: the movie was a blockbuster hit, so much so that the movie studio, in all its wisdom, decided to release a soundtrack album. The song was included on the album, and went on a roller coaster ride zooming up the charts, to the tune of over 12 million album sales. Now, that's a nice tune to hear. You just never know what is going to happen in this business.





## Unions, Trade Organizations, and Guilds

Unions have memberships. Unions have membership meetings. Unions vote on issues. Unions go on strike, or threaten to. Opportunity is knocking for the thinking songwriter.

I have a friend who took advantage of a union. After meeting with the local union heads and then the planning committee, he and the union hammered out a songwriting deal for coming up with songs containing the union's messages. My friend wrote several songs for the union, using the theme that the union bosses were pushing to the membership. The studio time was paid for up front by the union. The songs were paid for on delivery. It was a one-time fee.

This writer-singer retained the ownership of the copyrights and, over a four-year period, made more money than many writers ever make in their whole careers. In addition, this writer-singer was paid to travel and perform live in front of an audience of about ten thousand union leaders (a good potential fan base), and was compensated handsomely for the live appearance.

Sure, the songs were not high songwriting art that were meant to be classics, but the writer delivered the goods and the union heads and the members loved them. Some of these songs were 45 seconds long, or one minute to two minutes, max.

Ask yourself: Are you are a pro? Can you deliver?

## Politics—City, County, State, and the Nation

I have a songwriter friend who hooked up with a political party and was paid to write “Vote for Me,” “Look at Me” types of songs that covered an entire state. For delivering the goods, this writer did very well on payday. You can explore this avenue by making phone calls, attending political meetings where you live, and making a pitch about your ideas right on the spot.





Another writer I know wrote an antidrug song and submitted an idea to go with it about grade school kids not doing drugs. For every class where it was played, he was paid good bucks. The writer created a program that was expanded throughout the state school system. It is ongoing. Look into this kind of opportunity where you live.

How about this one? A writer was at a bank and was talking with one of its vice presidents, who mentioned that the bank was looking for a premium as a giveaway gift for new accounts. It was going to be pushed from Thanksgiving to New Year's. The writer-singer suggested that a Christmas album with some new songs about Christmas might be a good premium gift. The bank went for it and the writer-singer did very well, indeed. How many banks are close to where you live in your city? You can make an appointment today.

Another writer was having a bit of success, but nothing earthshaking. Frustrated at the pace and feeling things could be better, the writer wrote a Christmas song and, subsequently, it was recorded by a major artist for a Christmas album. The sales were very good, as they often are with Christmas albums. Happy holidays! An idea was born. Specialize in Christmas songs. Well, this had been done before, but he had a different slant on an old idea.

The writer started a campaign to find out who was going to be recording Christmas albums. Many of these albums are recorded as early as March, April, May, and June. So your holiday hat has to be on early.

As is often the case, this writer could produce only so many above-average Christmas songs. After thinking it through, the songwriter went to some songwriting friends and told them what he needed. Going from songwriter to music publisher to song plugger is an easy transition for some people. Our songwriter-publisher reached out to the local songwriter community and soon was representing several dozen songs—and getting them recorded. From this startup came the idea of all the holiday songs that could be recorded—for Easter, Valentine's Day, birthdays, Thanksgiving, Mothers Day, Father's Day, and so on.





This holiday songwriter-publisher is a very smart, hardworking person and works the catalogue all year long. A career is born. A niche is filled.

## Children's Songs—the Kids' Market

At one time, the children's market was almost totally sewn up, controlled by a few large companies. It was nearly impossible to break into these companies, no matter how good you were. Good news: that market has changed dramatically for the better. Better for you, the songwriter, and for the consumer.

The children's, tween, and teen marketplace is bigger than huge. The possibilities for marketing are endless. If you have the knack for writing and promoting, you have this wide-open market waiting just for you.

Clever characters in a song, coupled with great stories, voices, and illustrations, are bait that attracts people to products (known as parent traps) they buy for their kids. This special area of the business can be extremely lucrative. A little investigation should arm you with enough information to see if this niche of the music business is for you.

Composing children's songs can be a challenge to the best of writers. Writing songs for the one-digit age group entails walking a fine line between what-is-understood-by-the-kids and what they perceive as funny. You as the adult may think that six-year-old Mikey will "get it." Don't count on it. As with any genre within a genre, I urge you to study the history of kids' songs and immerse yourself in the music, including what is happening right now.

Kid tunes could be your future as a songwriter. This could prove to be a solid move for you. You may never be known well, even among other professional writers, but your bank account will just chuckle at that news.

As far as pitching your kid tunes, there are many companies. They have creative directors and producers, just like the rest of the biz. The bigger media companies are places to start. You may have to develop your demo pitch on a more elaborate plate before you make your presentation.





Getting an appointment with anyone can be very difficult in the kid market. Make sure that your product is protected on all fronts of copyright—that is, its characters, its music, its art.

Grab your kid muse and play the way you did as a youngster. *It's your career.* Get to work.

## Commercials, Ringtones, and New Media

There are other alternative ways for you to write songs. Commercials are a very difficult market to break into. You have to look around and *see songwriting wherever you look*. It may not be exactly where you want to go. It is just a way to make some money and write songs. This gives you experience. And not only do you gain experience, you are forced by time constraints to write hooks and a good melody that fit into a 30- to 60-second slot.

Consider cell phones. Ringtones. You are using your phone every day and someone is writing those ring tones, so why not you? “Mobisodes,” the studios’ cell phone delivery of short episodes, use songs, or what I call snippets of a song—one or two lines.

How about music or songs for videogames? The video market is exploding for the savvy songwriter. Professional writers often are given “project” songs to write. Writing on demand separates the professional from the wannabe. Look at it as part of your growth and training as a songwriter.

These are examples of the various niche markets available to songwriters. Check out every possibility that requires music. You might like them, and the bucks they bring in could add up to a very good year.

## Christian Music

The Christian-music market is huge. It is as hard to crack as any commercial market because *it is* a commercial market; believe me—it is commercial.





Although Christian music is a whole entity unto itself, you should study this market just like the other markets. It has its own trades and stars and charts. Some people are more comfortable working in this market because they feel they have a connection through their own beliefs. If you feel that is the case, then you have the niche that many writers look for. Working in this area of the music biz takes the same amount of energy and conviction and hard work as the secular market does.

## New-Age Music

This is another niche market that has its own distinct sound and message. New-age music has its own market, and a lot of people love it. It, too, has its own charts and trades, conventions, and alternative media coverage. If this is your market, all the rules and tips in this book work here as well.

## Writing for Hire

In many of the niche markets just mentioned, you may encounter a work-for-hire situation. Here's what that may entail:

1. You don't participate in the ownership of the copyright.
2. Your name may or may not be credited.
3. You will never make any additional monies or royalties on this song.
4. Many people will never believe you ever wrote the song!

Here is the upside:

1. You might make a nice chunk of cash. Sometimes, more than you would have otherwise.
2. You made a good contact and an impression. That could lead to more work.
3. Who cares if no one believes you?





4. I “ghost-produced” for a few folks, and you wouldn’t believe me if I told you who!
5. I co-wrote songs with no credit but got paid.
6. Some writers have spent entire careers writing for hire, and have done well for themselves.
7. Writing songs for commercials often falls into this category.

It’s songwriting and it takes a special talent to write a hit song for a commercial. Don’t pass up an opportunity to write a commercial. Writing in tight formats and constricted time frames is a real talent.

