

How To Market Your MP3 Downloads...Press A Vinyl Record

This is an update of a post that first appeared in [Buzzsonic.com](#), but I've updated the links and information somewhat to bring things up to speed. I thought it was worth reviving, simply because there is a massive renaissance in interest (and sales) in vinyl records, a format virtually killed off by major record labels in their crude attempts to get us to buy everything again on CD. Now that we're swamped by a billion and one MP3 downloads from a bazillion bands, there's a absence of scarcity, fans with musical ADD and bands are having to get increasingly creative to even get five minutes of attention (let alone that Warholian 15!).

OK then, its nothing short of amazing that today, theoretically you can have your music on sale, worldwide in one of the [biggest music retailers](#) stores on the planet. Without a tour, without a manager and even without a record deal. You can be based in Brighton, UK (for instance) and someone in Alaska or Australia or Russia or wherever can download your music without leaving the house. You don't have to leave the house to get it on sale either.

Also, if you signed up with a [good distributor](#), you'll be keeping around 75% of the retail price too.

I must admit, when I first saw [my music on sale](#) on the iTunes store it was exciting, as it was another 'career landmark' for me. Still, as music career landmarks go it really was no comparison to the day I walked into the Virgin megastore on Oxford Street, London, the day of its original release in 1996 when the original version of the [99th Floor Elevators 'I'll Be There'](#), went on sale.

There it was, prominently displayed in a rack with all the other big 12 inch releases of the week. And there it was in the big HMV just up the road too. More importantly to me, there it was in stock and in the top 10 buzz chart in [Trax Records](#) in Soho, ten minutes walk away from the glare of the west end. A few days later 'I'll Be There' had gatecrashed the national UK pop charts.

I used to spend a lot of money in dance music specialist Trax back in the days in the late 80s when I had to travel 160 miles by coach from my home in South Yorkshire to seek out those elusive Euro imports and Belgian [New Beat](#) gems that only Trax had.

And there is the point of this article. In a world where you don't even have to leave the house to get the latest [12 inch remix](#) or latest [indie release](#) or even [pay for music anymore](#), how do you as an artist make a difference when everybody is a digital record label and everybody can sit next to Elton John and the Beatles on the virtual record shelf?

"Further hinting at physical music format's dismal future, a new study shows 48 percent of U.S. teens did not buy a single CD last year. This means not 'Graduation', not 'Kala' and not even anything from that Soulja Boy guy. It means literally not a single one." Brock Thiessen from the Exclaim.ca article, '[Teens Not Buying CDs Anymore?](#)'

"I think the time is not too far off where some releases come out on vinyl and MP3 only — no CD. But who knows." Josh Maddel, [Other Music on Wired.com](#)

If you've more than a just passing interest in the state of the music industry you may have noticed a recent [surge of interest](#) and [press](#) on the apparent [vinyl revival](#).

"Everything old is new again," says Tom Biery, general manager of Warner Brothers. "Now that iPods and MP3's have become your parents music, too, kids want something different. The kids in the dorm with the turntable are the cool kids now."

So, there's no vinyl pressing plants left anyway right? Very wrong. There's a handful of pressing plants across the USA, UK, Europe and even two active manufacturers in [Australia](#).

"In the first half of 2011, vinyl record sales rose by 41%, and they continue to climb. So how do you translate that info into a unique, creative product and more sales? From mastering to design, get marketing tips on how to catch the attention of distributors, participate in Record Store Day, and build your "super fan" base with limited edition albums." [SXSW 'Value of Vinyl Production, Pressing & Promotion'](#)

Pressing up a release on vinyl is undoubtedly more expensive than CD but as a limited run single or album it's more of an event and even a great PR exercise. [Safely Meeting](#) Record label boss Carlos Wells sums it up best here. "The vinyl, it's more of an event. If you throw on a CD, you can almost toss it in from across the room. A record, by contrast, is a process. In 20 or 25 minutes you're going to have to go over, take the arm off, flip it over. You wind up paying more attention."

Creating a record is a complex process, but essentially breaks down into six separate steps.

Taken from the (now defunct) Quick Press website.

1. **Mastering:** A mastered DAT or CD is brought to a vinyl press. Two main changes must occur to begin the process of audio mastering, tonal balancing and level adjustment.
2. **Cutting:** Once the mastered version is finished, the track will be cut into lacquer. A digitally created track will be converted into an analogue wave for the cutting lathe. Transferred through an amplifier, the wave travels down the arm of a diamond-cutting stylus and onto a rotating lacquer disc.
3. **Stampers:** The lacquer or vinyl master is delivered to the pressing plant. The plant completes the following steps:
 - a) The vinyl master is covered with a thin spray and dipped in a bath of electrolyte. A current is passed through the solution and the silver-sprayed lacquer becomes coated in nickel which creates a negative image of the vinyl.
 - b) A second generation negative is created and the nickel plate is peeled from this lacquer to become the stamper. The stamper represents a negative image of one side of the vinyl.
 - c) Two stampers are needed to press up both an A and B sided record.
4. **Test Pressings:** With both stampers in place, a "puck" of vinyl is introduced into the press. Two labels are placed above and below the puck and the press is closed. In order to flow seamlessly into the grooves of the stamper, the vinyl is heated up to 200 C.
It is then rapidly cooled so that the vinyl can be immediately lifted out of the press. This whole process takes approximately 25 seconds. Normally, a short pressing of 10 copies is made first. These "test pressings" are sent to the record label for approval.
5. **Labels:** Many people are under the misconception that a "white label" is much cheaper than producing a professionally designed four-colour label. The real expense, however, comes from having the label incorporated into the vinyl. The colour of the label really makes no difference in this process.
6. **Artwork:** Image is key in almost every industry, making the music industry no exception. Great consideration should go into the label and its packaging, as well as the marketing accompanying its promotional push.

For a rough guide as to how much music you can fit on a vinyl record Nashville veterans [UR Pressings](#) have a useful [FAQ](#) and quick reference here:

7" – 4:30 minutes per side @ 45 rpm; 6:00 minutes per side @ 33 1/3 rpm
10" – 9:00 minutes per side @ 45rpm; 12:00 minutes per side @ 33 1/3
12" – 12:00 minutes per side @ 45 rpm; 18:00 minutes per side @ 33 1/3 rpm

And there's more record manufacturing tutorials [here](#) and [here](#).

California based [Rainbo Records](#) have several short run vinyl pressing deals which start at \$1329 for 500 12inch singles and \$829 for 500 7inch singles. Things like picture sleeves would add to that cost.

Some pressing plants, like United Records Pressings in Nashville are offering [vinyl + digital package deals](#) which includes a secure digital music hosting service, custom digital download coupons with unique one-time-use codes, packaged together. With the popularity of new [USB turntables](#) kids can plug their vinyl straight into their computer and rip to MP3 anyway.

In the UK (quotes taken from [Curved](#)) expect to pay around £850 for 500 12inch pressings and around £600 for 300 7inch singles (+VAT!). Take into account that there is a huge amount of variables/possibles and generally speaking the more you have pressed the cheaper the amount *per unit*. Also, if you need a repress then you wont have the expense of having plates to make up, which are the biggest single outlay in the whole process.

As for vinyl distribution, well for these short runs a band or DJ would be better served selling discs at gigs and via mail order using [TopSpin](#) and [Bandcamp](#) and using Paypal on their [own website](#).

Such is the fragile nature of the vinyl distribution business that many of the once thriving vinyl specialists have disappeared, leaving a narrow selection of [ultra niche](#) companies and major label [offshoots](#).

If you have a release in Florida you don't want to be trusting your stock with a distributor thousands of miles away in California. DIY for short runs. Vinyl record mailers you can get [here](#) or [here](#) in the USA. [Here](#) and [here](#) in the UK.

"Vinyl has a distinction factor, too. "It is just cooler than a download," explains Steve Redmond, a spokesman for Britain's annual Record Store Day. People used to buy bootleg CDs and Japanese imports containing music that none of their friends could get hold of. Now that almost every track is available free on music-streaming services like Spotify or on a pirate website, music fans need something else to boast about. That limited-edition 12-inch in translucent blue vinyl will do nicely." [The Economist 'The Revival of Vinyl'](#)

If you want to see what your tracks would sound like on vinyl you can get a one off 7" cut for around \$50 from [Custom Records](#) (in the US), who'll even go as far as pressing it in colour vinyl and giving it a picture sleeve for an extra \$58. In Europe you can find these 'lathe cuts' at [Dr Dub](#) in Austria and [Dub Studio](#) in Bristol. There are a few more, including legendary lathe cutter [Peter King](#) in New Zealand.

With many, many thanks to all the Vinyl uber-nerds at '[The Secret Society of Lathe Trolls](#)' forum.

USA Pressings:

[Archer Record Pressing](#) (Detroit, Michigan)
[Quality Record Pressings](#) (Salina, Kansas)
[Erika Records](#) (Downey, California)
[United Record Pressing](#) (Nashville, Tennessee)
[Morphius](#) (Baltimore, Maryland)
[Alpha Record Services](#) (Plantation, Florida)
[RecordPressing.com](#) (San Fransisco, California)
[Trutone](#) (New Jersey, NJ)

[Record Tech Inc](#) (Camarillo, California)
[Bill Smith Custom Records](#) (El Segundo, California)
[Musicol Recording](#) (Columbus, Ohio)

European Pressings

[Phonopress](#) (Italy)
[Microwatt](#) (Italy)
[Key Production](#) – London, UK
[Curved Pressings](#) – London, UK
[JTS Studio](#) – London, UK
[MPO](#) – France
[The Vinyl Factory](#) – London, UK
[Record Industry](#) – Netherlands
[GZ Vinyl](#) (Czech Republic)

ROTW

[Rip-V](#) (Montreal, Canada)
[Zenith Records](#) (Victoria, Australia)
[Toyokasei](#) (Japan)
[Tuff Gong](#) (Jamaica)

Related Reading

[Vinyl Records Pressing Plants List](#) (Totalsonic)
[The Time is Right for Direct-To-Fan Marketing of Music](#) (PBS Media Shift)
[75 Percent of Topspin's Sales Are Physical](#) (DigitalMusicNews)
[Building a House of Wax in Cleveland](#) (NY Times)
[The Secret Society of Lathe Trolls](#) (Lathe Trolls Forum)
[Back to black. Oddly, the hunger for records is widespread](#) (The Economist)
[Direct-To-Fan is NOT a Rich Band's Game](#) (Topspin)
[Vinyl Gets its Groove Back](#) (MIT via Time.com) pdf file. [Slashdot](#) response
[Vinyl Maybe Final Nail in CD's Coffin](#) (Wired.com) [Digg](#) response [IndieHQ](#) response
[Putting a New Spin on Vinyl Records](#) (NPR)
[How to Reissue a Record](#) (Classic Records)
[The Making Of Vinyl](#) (Random Good Stuff)
[Vinyl vs. iPod](#) (The Huffington Post)
[The CD is Dead... Long Live the New CD ?](#) (LAist)
[The End Of the Music Biz As We Know It](#) (Forester Research)
[The Inevitable March of Recorded Music Towards Free](#) (Techcrunch)