The DistroKid Dilemma: Are There Better Alternatives for Indie Artists?



If you distribute your music through DistroKid, the last few months have likely felt like a masterclass in anxiety. Between Universal Music Group's September lawsuit accusing the company of running an "AI slop pipeline" and the subsequent wave of silent takedowns that caught even properly licensed covers and original songs in the crossfire, the trust that independent artists placed in "the easy button" of distribution has been badly shaken.

When you are paying an annual fee, the bare minimum you expect is that your music stays online and that someone answers when it disappears. For many artists caught in the recent sweep, neither happened.

This raises the unavoidable question: **If DistroKid is this fragile, where else can you go?** The good news is that the distribution landscape is crowded, and several platforms offer not just stability, but better terms depending on how often you release music.

Here is a breakdown of the most viable alternatives, how their pricing actually works, and what you need to know before you switch.

CD Baby: The "Set It and Forget It" Option

If your biggest fear right now is your music vanishing because of a subscription lapse or a corporate lawsuit, CD Baby is the most fundamentally different model on this list. You pay **a one-time fee per release** ($9.99 for a single, $14.99 for an album) and CD Baby takes a **9% commission** on digital distribution revenue.

The upside is catalog permanence. You will not wake up to an email saying your album was removed because your credit card expired or because a major label filed a claim. The downside is that the 9% cut adds up over years, and the customer support experience can be slow. But for artists with a small catalog who want to release something once and never think about it again, the trade-off is often worth it.

TuneCore: The Direct Subscription Competitor

TuneCore is the closest structural match to DistroKid. Their entry-level "Rising Artist" plan starts at **$24.99/year** for unlimited releases with 100% royalty retention. They have invested heavily in publishing administration and sync licensing tools, which makes them attractive if you want a distributor that is trying to be more than just a pipe to Spotify.

The catch: If your subscription lapses or is cancelled, TuneCore can remove your catalog from stores. You are trading one subscription risk for another, but many artists find TuneCore's customer support and publishing infrastructure more responsive than DistroKid's.

Amuse: The "Keep Your Music Live" Model

Amuse has changed its pricing recently (the free tier is gone), but it offers something structurally fascinating: if you **stop paying, your music stays live**—but Amuse then takes a **25% commission** on your royalties until you re-subscribe or permanently remove the music.

Plans start at **$23.99/year** (Artist) and go up to $59.99 (Professional). This is a strong middle ground. You are not paying a high annual fee forever, and your catalog is not immediately held hostage if you take a break from releasing. Amuse also offers cover-song licensing at $14.99 per cover as a one-time charge, which is structurally better than DistroKid's annual cover fee if you keep a cover in your catalog for years.

UnitedMasters: The Brand-Deal Upside

UnitedMasters has carved out a niche by pitching itself as more than a distributor—they actively position themselves as a partner for brand deals, sync opportunities, and audience analytics. Their **DEBUT+ plan is $19.99/year** for unlimited releases and 100% royalties, making it the cheapest annual subscription option among the major players.

The caveat: If you cancel, your catalog comes down. UnitedMasters is best for artists who are actively releasing and want the extra sync and brand-partnership exposure, not for someone looking for a permanent archive.

Ditto Music: The Budget Option

Ditto starts at **$19/year** for unlimited releases, making it the cheapest annual subscription on the market. They have a long track record and cover the major platforms.

The catch: You need an active plan to withdraw royalties, and unprotected releases can come down if you stop paying. It is a solid budget choice, but it carries the same subscription-lapse risk as DistroKid.

RouteNote: The Revenue-Share Model

If you do not want any upfront or annual fee at all, RouteNote's free tier is the purest revenue-share model: **0 upfront cost, 15% commission** on distribution revenue. They also offer a Premium tier where you keep 100%.

RouteNote is excellent if you are testing the waters or have a large catalog that does not earn enough to justify a subscription. The obvious downside is that at scale, 15% is a significant cut—but for a first release or a dormant catalog, it is a low-risk way to stay online.

The One You Should Also Know About: Symphonic

Symphonic is not a DIY subscription platform in the same way as the others. It is a distribution and label-services company that works with

independent artists and labels, and it is known for strong customer support and playlist pitching. Pricing is not publicly listed as a flat DIY subscription—you typically have to apply or inquire—but it is worth knowing about if you are moving enough volume that you want a more hands-on relationship than a $25/year platform can provide.

How to Decide: Ask the Long-Term Question

The most important advice from the distribution analysts at RouteNote is this: **do not choose a distributor based on signup price. Look at what happens over five or ten years**.

- If you release **frequently** and want the lowest annual cost: **UnitedMasters DEBUT+** or **Ditto**.
- If you want your music to **stay live even if you stop paying**: **Amuse**.
- If you have a **small, permanent catalog** and hate subscriptions: **CD Baby**.
- If you have **no budget** and want to test the waters: **RouteNote Free**.
- If you want **publishing and sync infrastructure**: **TuneCore**.

No distributor is perfect, and the recent DistroKid situation is a reminder that even the biggest names can stumble. The safest strategy is to **know your terms, keep backup copies of your masters, and never assume any platform is too big to fail.**

Have you switched distributors recently? We want to hear your experience—good or bad. Send an email to todd@rockdogartists.org