

When Spotify Strikes: What to Do When Your Album Is Removed for "Artificial Streams"

A recent post in the ISSA Facebook group has struck a nerve—and for good reason. One of our members shared a devastating experience: Their most successful album was removed from Spotify after the platform flagged one of their tracks for "artificial streams." Despite exhaustive research proving the activity was organic, and despite reaching out to the distributor CD Baby, They're been unable to get the music reinstated.

Unfortunately, they are not alone. This scenario is playing out for more and more independent artists, and the frustration is mounting across the ISSA community.

The Problem: No Appeal, No Warning

Here's the hard truth that every independent artist needs to understand: **Spotify makes its own judgment about artificial streams and has no direct appeal process for artists**. When their system flags a track, the decision is final from the artist's perspective—you cannot call Spotify and plead your case.

When fraud is detected, Spotify charges distributors a penalty fee of approximately **$10–$11 per track per month**. Many distributors, including CD Baby, DistroKid, and TuneCore, pass these penalties directly to the artist. In more severe cases—or when a release is flagged repeatedly—the affected track or entire album is removed from the platform entirely.

And here's another gut punch: if a single track on an album is flagged, the **entire album** (the full UPC) is typically removed. As CD Baby's own support documentation states: "*It isn't possible to remove one track from an album from a partner, so if we remove a track, the full release/UPC it's associated with will be removed.*"

Why Switching Distributors Won't Help

Many artists' first instinct is to blame their distributor and switch to another provider. But as we stated, **switching distributors won't bring your album back**.

The Bigger Picture: A Growing Crisis for Indie Artists

This isn't an isolated issue. Independent artists are increasingly being affected by fraudulent streams—and by the aggressive enforcement actions meant to stop them. In Spotify's fight against AI scams and streaming fraud, **indie artists are often collateral damage**.

Spotify itself recognizes that the takedown of authentic music due to unauthorized artificial streams is a legitimate issue. But recognition doesn't equal recourse. The system remains punitive, not conversational, and artists are left with few options.

The Takeaway

The most important thing you can do is **prevention**. Vet every promotional service carefully, avoid anyone promising "guaranteed" streams, and monitor your Spotify for Artists dashboard regularly for any unusual activity.

But if you do receive that dreaded alert: stay calm, document everything, escalate professionally through your distributor, and be prepared for the possibility that your music may not be reinstated.

This is the reality of the streaming era—and it's a conversation every independent artist needs to have.

The flag follows the *content*, not the distributor. Spotify itself removed the album—it's not a CD Baby decision. A new distributor can't override that. And if you attempt to re-upload with new ISRC codes, you'll lose all your existing streams and playlist placements—with no guarantee the new upload won't get flagged again.

CD Baby is essentially the messenger in this situation, not the decision-maker. While they can escalate a case and request a manual review, they cannot reverse Spotify's determination.

What to Do If This Happens to You

If you receive an artificial streaming alert, **act quickly and methodically**:

1. Document everything immediately. Screenshot your Spotify for Artists dashboard (before and after stream counts), save all emails from Spotify and your distributor, and create a timeline of all promotional activities for the last 90 days. List every playlist, ad campaign, or promotional service you've used.

2. Escalate within your distributor. First-line support often can't help with these cases. Ask to speak with a specialist or supervisor. Provide all your documentation in an organized, professional manner and request that they escalate the case to higher-level contacts at Spotify for a manual review.

3. Pause all promotional activity immediately. Stop all paid advertising, playlist submission services, and third-party campaigns until the issue is resolved. This prevents any further flags while you're trying to sort things out.

4. Investigate the source of your streams. Review any marketing services you've used—especially those offering "guaranteed" streams. Even legitimate-looking PR firms can inadvertently trigger flags if their methods look suspicious to Spotify's algorithms. Warning signs of potentially fraudulent playlists include unusually high streams for unknown artists, low follower counts paired with high stream numbers, and misleading playlist names.

5. Consider consulting an entertainment attorney. If the financial impact is significant, professionals like **Krystle Delgado** (also known as "Miss Krystle")—an entertainment attorney, independent artist, and CEO of Delgado Entertainment Law—may be able to offer guidance. She understands both the artist's perspective and the legal complexities of these platform disputes.