

From the Listeners of The Rick Spins Radio Show

The Price of Airplay: Why Pay-to-Play Radio is Stealing Your Future

June's "Question of The Month": What are your thoughts on radio stations charging you to play your music?

So you just finished mixing that single. You're proud of it. You find an "internet radio station" that claims to support independent artists. You submit your track. You wait. Then the email arrives. It isn't a congratulations. It isn't a playlist slot. It's an invoice. "For a nominal fee, we will add you to our rotation." Stop right there. Delete the email. Close the tab. **Walk away.**

As members of the International Singer Songwriters Association (ISSA), you need to hear the hard truth: **If a station charges you to play your song, they are not a radio station. They are a toll booth.**

And driving through that toll booth is destroying your career and devaluing the entire industry.

The "Red Flag" Rate Card

Let's look at what these unscrupulous operators are actually selling. These are real examples from current "Pay-to-Play" schemes:

- **Global "Radio" Distribution:** $175 *for* 10,000+ *stations* (*with* "*PriorityReports*" *for an extra* $20/month)
- **Sync Licensing Contact List:** $120
- **Spotify Playlisting:** $135

Here is what they don't tell you: **They won't even listen to your song unless you pay.**

You work too hard on your craft to pay someone to ignore you.

The International Singer Songwriters Association maintains a **database of vetted, legitimate stations** on our website (issasongwriters.com). These are outlets that want good music because their *listeners* demand it.

Your Action Plan:

1. **Treat your submission fees like ad spend.** Ask: *What is my ROI?* If they can't guarantee $2 *back for every* $1 you spend, do not sign.
2. **Look for the Red Flag.** Anyone asking for money *before* agreeing to play your song is a predator.
3. **Use the ISSA Database.** Stick to the partners we have already verified for you.

The Bottom Line: Radio is a promotion tool. You should not pay for promotion that doesn't pay you back. Be smart. Be skeptical. And never, ever pay for airplay.

Keep writing. Keep singing. Keep your money in your pocket.

A legitimate radio station—terrestrial or internet—gets paid because they have listeners. They need great music to keep those listeners. The relationship should be symbiotic. With Pay-to-Play, the relationship is parasitic. You become the customer, not the artist.

The Math Doesn't Lie: You Are Losing 1000%

Most of these stations have microscopic listener bases. Let's do the math on your Return on Investment (ROI).

In the advertising world, when you spend money, you expect a return. Industry standards are brutal but clear:

- **Break-even:** You need to earn $2 *back for every* $1 spent (2:1 ROI).
- **Good:** $5 *back for every* $1 spent (5:1 ROI).
- **Exceptional:** $10 *back for every* $1 spent (10:1 ROI).

Now, ask yourself: *Will that* $150 "Premier Package" bring me $300 in ticket sales, merch, or streaming royalties?

Absolutely not.

In fact, you will likely lose money. Most of these stations don't report to SoundScan or royalty agencies. Even if they did, streaming payouts are fractions of a penny. You will pay them **1,000 times more** for the "privilege" of airplay than they will ever pay you in royalties.

The Hidden Damage to the Industry

Pay-to-Play doesn't just hurt your wallet; it floods the market with noise.

When money replaces merit, the quality of music dies. Real radio programmers (the good ones we vet at ISSA) spend hours looking for the next great songwriter. Pay-to-Play stations don't care if you are the next Bob Dylan or if you recorded your song on a potato. They only care if your credit card clears. *Send an email with the words "Pay to Play" to issasongwriters.todd@gmail.com and you'll receive a free Summit Raffle Ticket.*

This creates a race to the bottom. Why would a station build a loyal audience with great music when they can just charge 500 desperate bands $175 each?