Every month we receive questions about various subject from fellow artists. We have decided to share these questions and our answers as you might be asking the same questions!



The Advice Trap: How to Tell If Someone Is Helping You or Selling You

Two things landed in my inbox this week that I want to talk about together, because they're really the same story wearing different outfits.

The first was a question from an artist who was told by a PR person to pull their music from Spotify and move everything to Subvert.

The second was a lengthy email from a *"Record Company"* (music marketer) explaining why playlist placements, blog features, and radio play are a waste of money—and why you should focus on "guerrilla marketing" instead. (Conveniently, he also had a free 90-minute workshop to sell you on how to do that.)

On the surface, these two pieces of advice seem completely unrelated. One says leave streaming. The other says streaming promotion is a waste. But dig a little deeper and you'll find the same pattern: **someone with something to sell is telling you that everyone else is wrong.**

Let's break both of them down.

The Spotify Question

Should you pull your music from Spotify and move it to Subvert?

The short answer is no—and also, Subvert is worth exploring.

The Bottom Line

Neither the record company guy nor the "leave Spotify" PR person is necessarily wrong about the problems they're describing. Playlist pitching *is* often a scam. Spotify *does* have serious issues with how it pays artists. Major label strategies *don't* translate to indie budgets.

But the solution isn't to replace one piece of advice with another. It's to build your own framework for evaluating advice—and to remember that anyone who tells you they have the one true answer is probably selling something.

Keep your music on Spotify for reach. Explore Subvert for direct sales. Focus your marketing budget on re-engaging your existing audience rather than chasing one-time exposure. And when someone tells you that everyone else is wrong except them, ask yourself what they're selling.

Have a question for us? Send it in. We're here to help indie artists navigate this industry—without the misinformation and without the exploitation. Email Todd todd@rockdogartists.org

But here's the thing: **he's selling you something too.**

The entire email is structured to make you feel like everyone else is lying to you—and that he's the only one telling the truth. That's a classic marketing playbook. The "free workshop" is a lead magnet. The "don't trust other marketers" framing is designed to make you trust him instead. He's not exempt from the skepticism he's asking you to apply to others.

How to Evaluate Advice (From Anyone)

Here's the framework I'd suggest for evaluating any advice you receive as an independent artist:

1. Ask what they're selling. This doesn't make their advice wrong—but it does mean you should look at it through that lens. The record company guy sells guerrilla marketing courses. The PR person who said "leave Spotify" may have been positioning Subvert as the alternative she could help you navigate. Everyone has an angle. That's not inherently bad, but you should know what it is.

2. Look for evidence beyond anecdotes. "I've seen this work" is not the same as "this is how it works for most artists." Ask for data, case studies, or at least a clear explanation of why their approach would work for someone in your specific situation.

3. Be wary of all-or-nothing advice. "Leave Spotify." "Never pay for playlists." "Only do guerrilla marketing." The music industry doesn't work in absolutes. The artists who thrive are the ones who use multiple tools—streaming for reach, marketplaces for revenue, social media for connection, live shows for community—and adapt based on what's working.

4. Check the incentives. If someone tells you to abandon a platform while simultaneously promoting a different platform they're affiliated with, that's worth noting. If someone tells you paid promotion doesn't work while selling you a course on unpaid promotion, that's also worth noting.

5. Trust your own data. Your streaming numbers, your email list, your merch sales, your ticket sales—these are the only metrics that matter for your career. No one else's advice should override what your own audience is telling you through their behavior.

Subvert is a cooperative-owned music marketplace that launched publicly in May 2026. It's not a streaming service—it's a direct-to-fan marketplace, similar to Bandcamp but with a co-op structure that gives artists ownership and a voice. Artists and labels keep 100% of their sale proceeds after payment processing fees. It bans AI-generated content. And critically, it has **no exclusivity requirement**—you can sell on Subvert and keep your music on Spotify at the same time.

Spotify, for all its problems, is still where the listeners are. As of 2026, artists building primarily on Spotify capture 60–75% of their total streaming revenue from the platform. Leaving it entirely means walking away from the biggest source of streaming income most indie artists have.

The PR person who told your reader to pull their music wasn't necessarily wrong about Spotify's issues—the platform has faced lawsuits over its royalty thresholds and stream-filtering policies. But "leave Spotify" is a drastic solution that only makes sense if you have a massive, loyal fanbase that will follow you elsewhere. Most artists don't.

The better move: Keep Spotify as your discovery layer. Add Subvert as your direct-to-fan layer. Use Bandcamp if you already have an audience there. Diversify.

The Playlist Question

Now let's talk about the Record company email.

His core argument is actually correct. Building a sustainable career requires re-engaging your audience over and over. Research supports this—practitioners estimate it takes six to twelve touchpoints before someone commits to a deeper relationship with an artist. And he's right that major labels win through brute-force repetition, not through a handful of playlist placements. The average indie artist who lands a few playlists and a blog feature or two isn't creating the blanket exposure needed to turn a casual listener into a superfan.

He's also right that playlist pitching services are often predatory. Platforms like Amuse have warned that guaranteed streams and paid playlist-placement services may rely on illegitimate practices that can lead to withheld royalties or catalogue removal. Some services charge artists hundreds of dollars without showing exactly which playlists they're pitching to, and others quietly rely on bot-driven traffic.