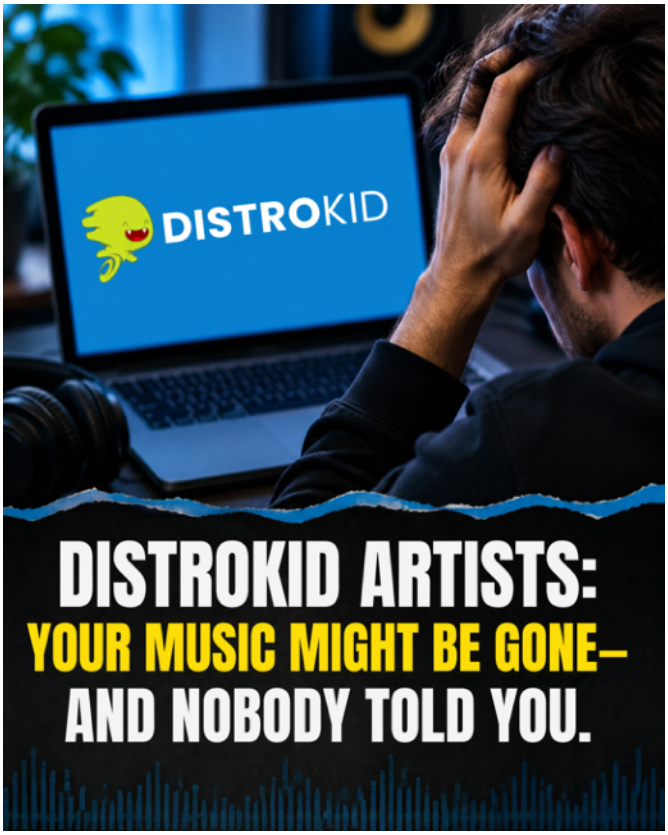
DistroKid, UMG, and the Takedown Nobody Warned You About



If you distribute your music through DistroKid, this is the most important thing you'll read this month.

On September 15, Universal Music Group—along with Capitol Records and Capitol CMG—filed a lawsuit against DistroKid in federal court in Delaware. The allegations: deceptive trade practices and copyright infringement, including distribution of unauthorized remixes and altered recordings, and what UMG describes as an "AI slop pipeline" that floods streaming platforms with mass-generated content and dilutes the royalty pool for genuine artists.

DistroKid's response was immediate and firm: "We strongly disagree with UMG's allegations and are disappointed that it chose litigation rather than established industry processes to address these issues". The company also said it takes "copyright protection, fraud prevention and the integrity of the music ecosystem seriously".

Then the takedowns started.

What Actually Happened

On October 10, independent artists began posting on social media that their music had disappeared from streaming platforms—no email, no

warning, no explanation. The next day, DistroKid confirmed the removals were a direct response to UMG's claims.

"A very small number of recordings distributed through DistroKid have been removed in response to claims made by UMG," said Amanda Ferri, DistroKid's VP of Artist Services. She added that the company "strongly dispute[s] the allegations underlying UMG's lawsuit" and regrets "the disruption to affected artists".

But the artists caught in the sweep tell a different story—and their accounts raise serious questions about how "small" this really was, and who exactly got caught.

The Artists Who Got Hit

McGwire, a musician who describes himself as a "Video Game boy," told *The Verge* that six of his songs were removed. He received no communication before or after. When he tried to find out why, he first had to endure what he called a "lengthy circular conversation" with a bot before reaching a human being.

The removed tracks included:

- A cover of Stevie Wonder's "Isn't She Lovely" that McGwire says he properly licensed
- A song built on a beat he purchased through a marketplace—one that had also been licensed to other artists
- A track flagged for an uncleared sample—except the song he allegedly sampled was released **two years after his own**

Insane Ian, a nerdcore rapper, posted that he "had an original song taken down with no warning, and they wouldn't tell me why either".

King Chase told *The Verge* that an entire album by an artist he works with was removed with no communication. The album had been up for three to four years without a single copyright strike.

Music producer Jesse Cannon offered a blunt assessment: "DistroKid gave up on customer service about two years ago." He said former employees told him the company sees customer service as "a waste of profits since they have such a high market share".

The Bigger Picture: This Isn't Just About AI

UMG's lawsuit is framed around AI-generated "slop"—mass-produced tracks flooding streaming services and stealing royalties from real artists. That's a legitimate concern. But the takedowns are catching music that has nothing to do with AI.

That's the part every independent artist should be paying attention to.

When a distributor responds to a major label lawsuit by pulling first and asking questions later, the artists who pay the price are the ones with the least power to fight back. A licensed cover gets caught. A legally purchased beat gets flagged. A four-year-old album disappears because an automated system said so—and the only recourse is a DMCA counter-notice and a 10-business-day wait.

And this is happening while UMG and Sony are separately subpoenaing DistroKid for its monthly submission data and AI detection tools, arguing the company has "an outsized role in distributing AI-generated music" and that between March and September 2026, DistroKid delivered nearly 12 million tracks to a single major streaming service—more than half of all tracks delivered to that service, exceeding all other distributors combined.

The pressure on DistroKid is enormous. And when pressure goes up, the artists at the bottom of the chain feel it first.

What You Can Do Right Now

1. Check your catalog today.

Log into DistroKid. Check your releases on Spotify, Apple Music, and every platform you distribute to. Don't assume everything is where you left it.

2. If something is missing, file a counter-notice.

DistroKid's published guidance says artists who believe their content was removed "as a result of a misidentification or mistake" can submit a DMCA-compliant counter-notice. Once filed, DistroKid is obligated to wait 10 business days before reinstating the content. It's not fast, and it's not fair—but it's the process available to you.

3. Document everything.

Release dates. ISRC codes. License agreements for covers. Receipts for beat purchases. Screenshots of your dashboard. If your music disappears, you need proof of ownership and authorization ready to go.

4. Don't rely on a single distributor.

This is a hard lesson, but an important one. Diversification isn't just good business—it's protection. If one pipeline gets shut down, you need another way to reach your audience.

5. Watch for updates.

This story is moving. UMG and Sony's subpoenas are new, the lawsuit is ongoing, and DistroKid's response strategy may shift again. We'll be tracking it.

The Bottom Line

DistroKid built its business on being the easy, affordable way for independent artists to get music onto streaming platforms. That ease came with a trade-off: when things go wrong, there's often no human to call, no warning before your music vanishes, and no clear path to a fix.

UMG's lawsuit may be aimed at AI fraud. But the collateral damage is landing on real artists with real catalogs and real income on the line.

Check your music. Know your rights. And don't wait for an email that isn't coming.

Rock Dog Newsletter is a publication of Rock Dog Music Foundation, a woman-led nonprofit dedicated to empowering independent musicians through education, community, and accessible resources. We're here for all indie artists—without misinformation and without exploitation.