

Ten Ways To Get Your Music Into Film and Television Productions

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INTRODUCTION

There is one basic fact about the film and television music industry that drives much of what you will read in this guide: it is a very, very competitive business and there are many more songs and instrumental music pieces than there are openings and places to use them in film and television. In Los Angeles on any given day, hundreds, maybe thousands of people are marketing their music for film and television productions. This guide is designed to show you how you can successfully compete in this industry, whether you live in Los Angeles, New York, or in a small country town far removed from the major music cities. Let's begin with some basics.

“Location, Location, Location!” – The tried but true real estate mantra is definitely applicable to the film and television music business. A simple fact: being in LA or NY can make it easier to compete for work. While film and television shooting locations can be found worldwide, the infrastructure for post production, which includes music, is still centered in Los Angeles. Although this is changing rapidly as cheap digital editing equipment becomes available in other cities, in film work, the city that the director resides in can also be a major factor in underscore work.

It's useful to note that song placement is much less location-oriented than score composing. Score composing requires a weeks-long cycle where it can be very helpful if the director and composer are in close physical proximity so demos can be heard. Song placement is much more easily done from locations outside of LA since once the director or music supervisor decide they want to use a song, the physical location of the songwriter is not that important.

That much being said, if you're in LA or New York, make the most of it and seek out personal relationships with people in the business. Film directors, television producers, and music supervisors are among the most important people you can meet in terms of getting your music into film and television projects. By putting a “face with a name,” you can increase the chances of your music being heard.

If you're not in LA or New York, then you may have to work a bit harder to get “noticed” and get your music listened to. In this case, it may be valuable to position yourself as a newcomer, with fresh and interesting music for film and television productions. Especially if you're looking for work as a score composer, it's vital that directors be able to communicate with you as easily as if you were located next door. Make sure your email, fax, and voicemail services are in place and indicate a professional presence. Some composers who live outside of LA have toll free numbers or “rent” LA phone numbers through an answering service in the 310, 213 or 818 area codes to make local communications easy for clients and prospects. In no way is it recommended that you avoid being honest about the fact that you live out of town, but it may be advisable to establish whatever kind of local presence that you can, especially given today's communications technology possibilities.

Introduction – continued

Now let's explore the different ways you can get your music into film and television projects. Please read "The Direct Approach: Filmmakers" first, since it contains many ideas and actions you can take to help make the music submission process go in your favor. Approaches 2 – 10 deal with people other than filmmakers, but most utilize one or more of the actions described in "The Direct Approach."

We'd like to wish you good luck with your projects, and it's our hope that you will find much success as you promote and market yourself and your music to the industry.

#1 – The Direct Approach: Filmmakers

The Direct Approach involves identifying marketing targets for your music and approaching them about using your music. Some elements of the Direct Approach may be useful in other techniques of getting your music into film and television projects, and we'll refer to them again later as necessary.

Before you establish yourself in the marketplace, decide what your strong points are, and what type of music you want to be known for writing. While this may involve a lot of introspection and self-evaluation, it's an important step. In the Film/TV music business, composers and songwriters are often *pigeonholed* – that is, they have a “label” attached to them based on people's perceptions of what type of music they are most skilled at writing or most known for. You've heard this before... “He's a country singer,” “She writes great ballads,” “He does that kind of techno stuff,” “He does orchestral music,” “She's mainly a comedy writer.” Yes, this is the kind of conclusion someone can come to (and tell their friends about) after listening to anywhere from 20 seconds to 20 minutes of your demo tape. Hint: Avoid stereotypes by controlling the situation – don't let people decide what you should be “known as.” Instead, position yourself in advance based on what type of music you really do well and want to become known for.

The Direct Approach can include the following steps:

1. Use as many resources as you can to locate projects that you believe your music would be well-suited for. Most people in the business who are “gatekeepers” – that is, people who decide whose music should be used or not, are working on one or more projects at a time. The vast majority of music requests from those who hire composers and songwriters for film/tv projects are based around the specific needs of a project. Hint: Use every possible means to locate projects and be organized about your research. See Appendix “A” – Sources of Production Information for more information on this.
2. Once you've identified projects that you're interested in, find the right *people* to approach for those projects. For each project, make a list of people that you believe may be involved in selecting music. For films, consider starting with the Director (best for score) and/or the Music Supervisor (best for songs, but can also be important in the score composer hiring decision). For television projects, one of the producers, executive producers, or associate/line producers will often handle music needs. Sometimes the film studio's VP of Music has a role in selecting music, so identifying this person can be important. Hint: Dig deep to find out who the real decision makers may be for music. Don't stop at secretaries and assistants who may not want to speak with you – check directories such as the Hollywood Creative Directory and other production company reference books to find out who the music people are. Also, check the credits on previous projects that the production company has done – this can be done on the Internet using the Internet Movie Database (www.imdb.com) and through the use of directories.
3. Examine your existing network of friends, acquaintances, and professional relationships to determine if there are any existing relationships that may be helpful when introducing yourself to your prospects. It's important that you use every possible existing relationship

you have to try and reach these people with a “name attached” – that is, someone that they know whose name you can use to open the door with. Also, don’t be shy about taking advantage of the networking opportunities that exist in the industry through organizations such as The Film Music Network (visit www.filmmusic.net), the Independent Feature Project and IFP/West (www.ifp.org) ASMAC in Los Angeles, and other industry groups that promote networking events

4. Approach your targets with knowledge about their current and past projects, express a high degree of informed interest in their current project (the one you’ve targeted) and request permission to submit your music. While all of this is easier said than done, this strategy has worked well for many. It’s vital to get as much information about your marketing targets – in addition to information about their current project(s), learn about what they’ve worked on before, with whom they’ve worked, and what types of projects they like to do. It’s no secret that people like to be admired, and presented properly, your research can certainly be seen as a form of professional admiration. Be tasteful in your presentation, but do your homework in advance and have that data ready to use. In order to be successful, you’ve got to get your music heard. That means approaching marketing targets with the clear goal in mind of them hearing your music, whether you mail them a package or meet with them. Remember: without hearing your music, how do they know that it isn’t the *perfect match* for their production! Keep that thought in your mind as you use your people skills to get your music heard.
5. Follow up with those who you send your music to and determine their response to you and your music. This is a critical step that is skipped or overlooked by many. Just sending out your materials and waiting by the phone is not the optimal way to work in an overcrowded field – you’ve to get noticed one way or another, and that often requires a proactive approach, not a reactive one. An effective way to follow up that is used by many successful composers and agents is to use a “cycle” approach. This consists of calling the prospect (the person who you sent your materials to) and inquiring as to the status of your submission and their reaction. A typical response is either “we haven’t received your package yet” or “we haven’t had a chance to listen to it yet” or “you’re being considered along with other composers.” If they haven’t received the package yet and it’s been a week or 10 days, then let them know you’ll send another. Most likely your package got to the prospect’s company, but may have been misrouted or set aside. If they haven’t had a chance to listen to your music yet, then set up a cycle – most often this is a weekly or 4-5 day sequence of events where you ask if you may call them back in “x” days and check in with them. It’s rare that you’ll get a “no” from this, and by creating a cycle of commitment to callback, you have the opportunity to establish a rapport with the prospect. Call him back after the specified number of days, and be positive and energetic (but not so much that you appear anxious). See if they’ve had a chance to listen to your tape, and if not, schedule another callback.

Once you’ve completed these steps, you’re likely to get a “yes” or a “no” answer from the prospect. If you get a “yes” answer, then it’s your job to move things to the next level, which usually involves setting up a meeting. Take advantage of the “yes” momentum by setting that meeting at the earliest convenient time, and be ready for anything and everything at that meeting, including discussing the terms of the deal, your previous film and television

projects, and anything else that a filmmaker or production company executive might be interested in.

If you're a score composer, you may be asked to "demo score" a scene or two from the film to demonstrate your ability to take direction and write to picture. While the "old guard" in our industry still bemoan this type of demo work, it's become very commonplace and the best strategy usually is to ace the demo score and lock up the deal. Refusing to do a demo score is a risky stance to take unless you're very, very sure that your name has lots of leverage with the director, producer, and whoever else might be in on the decision making process that you don't know about yet.

If you're a songwriter, the key task can often be determining what must happen in order for the film to use your music. Once the music supervisor and/or director has indicated interest in your material, it's up to you to keep the momentum going and determine what challenges lie ahead. If possible, try and get the music supervisor or director to map out the process they're going through to pick songs and get them licensed. Be ready to assist or help expedite any and all stages of the selection/licensing process and you may be able to avoid some unexpected but common roadblocks, such as the case when a clerk at the publisher or record company doesn't return the music supervisor's calls in a timely manner and the music supervisor decides that your music is too much of a hassle to deal with. Yes, that's happened, and it's not a pretty picture. You'd be surprised how many office workers don't have a clue how important a song placement can be for the career of a songwriter or artist! It's your job to help them know how important it is that they handle requests for your music the way you want them handled.

However, If you get a "no" answer once the film's music people have heard your music, it's very important to try and determine why you were not selected for the job. Sometimes an approach of asking so that you could improve your demo tape, etc. is effective, but other times a simple "it would be great to know why I wasn't selected" direct question will get you the information you need. Often the prospect won't hesitate to tell you this, since it helps justify his decision. If you approach the situation with respect and a positive energy (even if you aren't selected!), you can go a long way towards establishing a relationship that can produce positive results "down the road" when that prospect next needs music.

Summary: The Direct Approach, the most common approach for getting your music into film and television projects, can bring you positive results if you are consistent and determined in your efforts. Follow-up actions after your music is submitted can often make the difference between your music being "lost in the shuffle" or being listened to.

#2 – Music Supervisors

The Music Supervisor is perhaps the most understood job description in today's film music business. That is the case for many reasons, especially given the fact that the role of a music supervisor can be completely different from one film to the next. Music Supervisors come from a variety of backgrounds, and since there is no accreditation or credentials-issuing organization for Music Supervisors, they may have lots of experience and skills, or practically none.

Music Supervisors are perhaps the most difficult player to deal with in the film music business for exactly this reason. Their role in a film can be completely different from one film to the next, and sometimes their *actual* role and what they *think* their role is can be entirely different.

In the past, Music Supervisors were primarily concerned with making sure that the music used in a production was properly licensed and documented, and their involvement was often limited to source music (music heard on the screen by the actors such as background music in a restaurant scene) and songs. However, Music Supervisors are more and more becoming involved with the score for a film, and are usually involved or at least consulted on the hiring of a score composer. If you're looking to place songs in films or television productions, the Music Supervisor can be the most important contact of all, as Music Supervisors are usually in charge of locating and helping to select all songs used in a film or television production.

As a general rule, it's good to get to know as many Music Supervisors as you can. It can be helpful to get a current directory of Music Supervisors (check out "The Film & TV Music Guide" published by the Music Business Registry available at The Film Music Store online at www.filmmusicstore.com) and do regular postcard mailings and call selected supervisors from time to time to establish relationships. Remember that the business is built on relationships, so be careful how you create and nurture these relationships – you never know when they'll become important, or even critical to a film you want to get your music into.

In addition to the "general" approach of cultivating relationships with Music Supervisors, it's important to remember that most supervisors are working on a particular project or projects at any given time, and they'll be looking for music for these projects. So, we're back to the tried and true "project" oriented approach where you identify projects that you want to submit on and make contact.

Here's a step-by-step method that you can use to help work successfully with Music Supervisors that are working on specific projects:

1. Identify a project that you're interested in. You can use any of the usual sources for this, including the entertainment trade magazines (Hollywood Reporter, Variety) or any number of online sources that keep databases of projects in process.
2. Call the production company and find out if there is a Music Supervisor attached to the project. Usually this information is fairly easy to get, but occasionally you may

have to do some “digging” and contact multiple people from the production company to determine the music supervisor situation. Hint: production company phone numbers are located in the trade magazines, but a handy book that lists many of them that can be very useful is the Hollywood Creative Directory – see the Film Music Store or entertainment oriented bookstores to obtain this.

3. If there is no Music Supervisor attached to the project, you may want to contact the director, or wait until the project has advanced to the point that there is a Music Supervisor attached or the director is ready to listen to music.
4. Once you do get the name of the Music Supervisor, locate their phone number if you don't already have it from the production company, and call the Music Supervisor. The key data to get is: what type of music are they looking for production “X”? Getting this may be as simple as introducing yourself, then noting that you are aware that they're working on production “X,” and then asking if they're looking for music and if so, for what type. In some cases, they will guard this information carefully, but in most cases they're at least willing to tell you something about what type(s) of music they're looking for. This is the key piece of data that must be obtained to move forward.
5. If you have music that's appropriate, ask politely if you could submit it to the Music Supervisor. Be very polite, but firm. A key element is to be positive and enthusiastic about how you can fulfill their need. However, make sure your enthusiasm is seen as being directed towards filling their need, not about how “great” your music is... hearing someone crow about themselves or their product is a real turnoff. Your objective in this step is to get permission to send your music to them as “requested material” – make sure you put that on the outside of the package you sent them, by the way, or your package may very well be pitched into the “unsolicited music – return to sender” stack that every Music Supervisor has.
6. If you are having trouble getting permission to send your music in connection with a specific project, you may want to try the “mentor” approach. It's not as direct and businesslike as a direct submission for a project, but it's been known to work in some cases. It consists of a change in tactics – if they won't let you submit on a project, then as them if they would at least be willing to listen to your music and share with you their thoughts about the music once they've heard it. You can emphasize how much you value their opinion, with their “years of experience,” etc. and how much you would appreciate just the opportunity to hear their ideas and thoughts about your music. Now you're positioning yourself into a kind of student-mentor relationship with the supervisor. While some supervisors may not take you seriously with this approach, many will, because as human beings they like to be put on a platform as a teacher, resource, etc. to advise others. Be humble, but don't be ingratiating.... Maintain your honor, respect, and dignity while putting yourself in the role of the person to be advised or helped, and you'll maintain the quality and character of the relationship you're building with the supervisor. Again, it all comes down to finding a way to get them to listen to your music.

7. Once the Music Supervisor has listened to your music, it's very important to get feedback about what they thought about the music and how appropriate they think it would be (or wouldn't!) for the project you're submitting for.
8. If the feedback you get is a "no" or negative, find out what they didn't like about the music, and if you have other music that might be a closer match to what they're (now) looking for, ask if you may submit it. You may or may not get a second chance to submit, and don't be disappointed if you don't get that second chance... keep in mind how important the first chance is for the future, however!
9. If you do get a second chance, submit again and repeat step 7 to get feedback on the second submission.
10. If you're close enough to be seriously considered, you may want to consider the following actions:
 - (1) Finding out what it would take for the Music Supervisor to play your music for the director.
 - (2) Determining if some adjustment in your music – change of lyrics, new arrangement, new recording, etc. would make it more suitable for the project.
 - (3) Find out what the "next step" is in getting your music considered. That is, find out who needs to hear your music next, and how the decision making process will work.
11. Keep in touch regularly with the Music Supervisor, and track the progress of the decision making process and who's involved with the approval process throughout the life of the production. Your communications here can also help you get information on other productions that the music supervisor becomes involved with.

In the final analysis, communications is what will likely make the difference in your success with Music Supervisors – communications via your introduction to them, communications about what they're looking for, and communications about how they like your music and what can be done to move forward in the process. It is absolutely essential that you find ways to develop positive communications with Music Supervisors in order to be noticed by them – to be "on their radar," as some would say. Many times, it comes down to being as persistent as possible without becoming a pest. Remember, it's a fine line between the two...

#3 – Music Editors

Music Editors are another category of film music professional whose job is changing and evolving constantly. In the past, Music Editors (or “cutters” as they used to be called, referring to their work splicing tapes with razor blades in the old days) spent most of their time organizing the music used in a film or television production, physically editing the music by cutting and splicing magnetic tape, and making lists and documents about the music, such as cue sheets for the performing rights societies and various logs and listings of music that the production company required.

Nowadays, however, Music Editors are doing a lot more than making lists. Today Music Editors are heavily involved in creating the “temp track” for a film – the music (usually from other films) that is “temped in” or added to early edits of the film so those who preview the film can hear something other than silence. Some major films will have a special “Temp Track Music Editor” whose sole job it is to create the temp track. With the advent of cheap digital gear, the “art” of creating a temp track has advanced in a major way to the point that today, music editors are often editing together small pieces of many scores (some only a few seconds long) to create extremely elaborate temp tracks that sound remarkably good in some cases. Some sound so good, in fact, that when a composer is hired, the composer has to live up to the example that the temp track has set. This can be a tall order in many cases, especially when the budget used to record the music on the temp track bears little resemblance to the budget being provided for the current project.

Anyway, how does this all help you get your music into film, you ask? It’s easy. Think of how many times the director will hear that temp score. Dozens of times at least, maybe hundreds. Also think about how many other heavyweights on the production team will hear that temp score... the producers, the film editor, and the list goes on. The bottom line: it can be a very good thing to have your music used as part of the temp score. If the decision makers like it enough, they might ask the Music Editor where he got that music. And then, a door can open for you.

Music Editors today need to have access to large collections of music from which to draw on to create today’s elaborate temp scores. That’s your opening – become part of their library and several things can happen: (1) they can use your music in their temp scores, (2) they might recommend you to a filmmaker – remember that the Music Editor can be hired before the composer, and (3) you build a relationship with a Music Editor who can help you on later projects.

Here’s a game plan you might want to consider with Music Editors:

1. When a Music Editor is working on a project, he/she often has to work long hours and doesn’t have a lot of time for meeting new folks. Therefore, consider using a “relationship” approach rather than approaching a Music Editor for a specific project as you might do with a Music Supervisor.
2. Get a list of Music Editors (again, the Film & TV Music Guide available at the Film Music Store at www.filmmusicstore.com can be helpful here) and choose an

assortment of them to begin with. Call first, and ask if you could send them some samples of your music. If this works, great. If not, you might want to try sending postcards to them first at the conclusion of each project you do – perhaps monthly. The postcards might say something as simple as “Composer Joe Smith has just completed the score for GOING HOME for the CBS Television Network” or something like that. Then, try calling the Music Editors after they’ve received a few postcards and may be familiar with your name.

3. Once you have struck up a relationship with a Music Editor, find ways to send more and more of your material – always send it on CD so it’s ready to be used in a temp track, and always mark the CDs with your name and phone number.
4. You may want to ask the Music Editor if they have some specific music needs coming up for any projects. If so, be ready to respond with some music.
5. As with any relationship, keep the channels of communications open. Be frequent with your communications, but don’t be a pest.

A Music Editor can be a very, very valuable ally in the search for films to get your music into. Each relationship is golden – nurture the relationship and it can pay off handsomely. And don’t forget – on many films, the composer has a say in hiring the Music Editor. Don’t be surprised if a Music Editor wants to build a relationship with you as much as you want to build one with him!

#4 – Work Your Network

This method is simple, but is often overlooked. Don't make that mistake!

Working your network means utilizing relationships and acquaintances you already have to work your way into a film or television project. The key piece of data you should remember here is that there are many, many different doors into a film project. Some are obvious, like getting to know the director or music supervisor. But other ways are much less obvious, like getting to know the 3rd Assistant Director who happens to be a friend of the guy you play racquetball with once a month...

To successfully work your network, you need to assess everyone you know who might know someone (who might know someone) in the “business” – the entertainment business, that is. Use your existing relationships and acquaintances to get an introduction to someone working on the film you want to get your music into – even if that “someone” is a grip (*grip* – a worker who helps with physical labor on the set). You never know when that grip might be having lunch with the director or assistant director and mention this “great composer” he knows, and you know what happens after that...

Here's a plan for working your network:

1. Do a “relationships and acquaintances” inventory (we'll call it R&A) which lists everyone you know who has anything at all or might have anything at all to do with the film and television industry. If you have some acquaintances who you haven't spoken to in a while on this list, then by all means call them up and renew that relationship – build on it if you can.
2. Through conversations, gather data about your R&A list and who they're working with now. Depending on the relationship, you may want to come right out and ask if they know anyone who is working on the project (or projects) you're interested in.
3. Divide up your R&A list into two lists – one that lists those who might be connected in some way with people from the project you're looking at getting your music into, and those who are not connected with this project and don't know anyone who is.
4. The first list should get your undivided attention and should be harvested to try and make a connection and get an introduction to someone – anyone who is connected with your target production. The second list should be put on the “renew” cycle where you renew the relationship by calling each person at least once a month and making contact. Sometimes you might want to augment this with postcards, etc. as discussed before.
5. Once you are able to get an introduction to someone working on the film you're targeting, express your interest in the project and what that person is doing on the project, how it's going, etc. and try and develop a direct relationship with that person. It's not a crime to let that person know that you're interested in learning more about the project, but don't make that person think that that's the sole reason you're contacting them – it's too “sales oriented” and can backfire on you.

6. As with other relationships, nurture your relationship with whoever you meet on a project and develop it to the point where you're comfortably discussing your interest in the project. Then, proceed as in the "Direct Approach" discussed in this guide and determine which person or persons is handling the music, and proceed from there.

Don't ever underestimate your network, and don't ever stop expanding your network as far as you can in the business. You never know when someone will recommend you, and as they say, you need all the friends you can get in this business.

#5 – Film Editors

A film's editor is the person who edits (or "cuts") the film for the director. Why are you interested in this person? Simple:

1. The editor is the person who works most closely with the director for most of the post production process. The filmmaker will look to the editor for references and suggestions, and editors can certainly be involved in suggesting composers and songwriters.
2. The editor can be the person who creates the temp music track on some films (see #3 – Music Editors for more information on temp tracks). For the same reasons as listed in the Music Editor section, it's great to be known and liked by film editors.
3. The editor is usually hired long before music is ever considered. Getting introduced to a project early on can mean a huge difference for a composer or songwriter, as early music needs can be handled and there is all that much more time to build the relationships you want with the music supervisor and director.

You may want to consider using a similar approach to film editors that you do with Music Editors – get to know them, get your music into their hands, and find ways to build relationships with them that result in them introducing you or your music to filmmakers they work with.

Film editors are usually hired for a much longer period of time than music editors are, so take this into account when you're meeting them. Depending on the project you're looking to get your music into, you may want to find a way to meet the film's editor during the early or mid stages of the project – preferably before post production gets into full swing. However, consider using the "relationship" approach and build as many relationships as you can regardless of what projects the editors are working on currently. As with Music Editors, consult guides and directories (or choose editors you enjoy the work of from previous films), do your homework and become familiar with their work, and find a way to approach them or meet them through a third party (your Network becomes important here!) and get your music to them.

#6 – Studio Music Executives

Music executives at film and television production companies can be very important when it comes to hiring a composer or songwriter for a project. At the very minimum, you want to be “familiar” to these folks who can easily raise a red flag if a production comes along with a composer who is totally unknown to the executive. At the other end of the hiring spectrum, in some cases production companies will look to their music VP or music executive for suggestions of which composers or songwriters to approach for a production. Your music and your relationship with these folks can make the difference in whether or not you are included in the “recommended” list...

Keep in mind that in most cases, the producer or director for the specific film or television production you’re looking to get your music into will be making the music decisions – the studio music executive may not even get involved until after the composer or songwriter is already hired.

An effective strategy to becoming “familiar” to an executive is finding ways to get your name in front of that person. Periodic postcards sent that list recently completed projects can be very effective, as can advertising, meeting the person at industry gatherings, and other ways of getting your name in front of the person. The important part of this strategy is repeated exposure to your name, and hopefully your music. It’s the same principal that advertisers use when they repeat the phone number three times at the end of their radio ads, etc. Repeated exposure will increase familiarity and name recognition, and that can mean a big difference with studio music executives.

Here are some ideas for working with studio music executives:

1. Find out who the executives are – many industry guides list these people. Develop a “target list” of execs you want to know your name. Consider including those who work with the big studios and those who work with smaller studios – select a nice cross-section.
2. Use the relationship approach – try calling the exec and introducing yourself, then ask if you could send along a demo to acquaint him/her with your music. Usually, they’ll say “yes,” but whether they will actually listen to the demo is another question. The important result of this step is to get a “yes” to your request to send them a demo package.
3. Send the demo package, and make sure to write on the outside of the envelope: REQUESTED MATERIALS. This will help the package not get dumped at the mailroom as “unsolicited” as many packages are, unfortunately!
4. Follow up with a call in 10 days to 2 weeks and see if the exec has been able to listen to your materials. If not, try back in another 10 days or so, and thank the exec for his/her time. Don’t push too hard at this step.
5. Now it’s time to begin the relationship-building process. The key thing here is to keep your name “recognizable” by the executive. One of the best ways to do this is

by regular postcard mailings and a phone call every 4-6 weeks or so. The reason for calling/sending postcards: keeping the executive up to date with your latest projects and successes. Keep the conversations short and meaningful, and think long-term relationship development.

6. As you make each call to the executive, consider how you might be of use or help to him. Consider asking some probing questions during the call about what projects they're working on, what's hot, what's not, etc. and take careful notes about the information you learn. If there's a chance to be helpful in a particular situation, consider gently offering or positioning yourself in a "solution offering" role. But again, don't push too hard or you'll sound more like a salesman than a composer or songwriter!
7. Continue the calls, develop the relationship, and be on the lookout for telltale signs of opportunities, whether it be a concern or frustration about a project or the industry, or an introduction to a composer or songwriter the executive admires farther up the "food chain" than you are now. Either of these situations can be turned into opportunities to get your music into film and television projects if you play it right. An important goal as the relationship begins to develop: find a way to meet the person so he can put a "face" with your name. Even one meeting can make a huge difference in how you're perceived, and has the potential to strengthen a relationship far beyond what can usually be achieved by email, postcards and phone conversations.

Summary: Develop relationships with studio and production company music executives, and keep in contact as many ways as you can. Always be on the lookout for opportunities, but never push too hard. Position yourself to be a solution to a problem or situation whenever possible, and consider these relationships to be long-term assets.

#7 – Teams and Collaborators

The subject of composing and songwriting teams and collaborators could fill a book, so we'll limit it here to the scenarios which can be most useful towards getting your music into film and television productions. There are 3 scenarios which are commonly seen, and we'll discuss the positives and negatives of each:

The Composing Team

This is seen most frequently in television animation projects, although it can exist in other more corporate composing setups. Ad agencies and music libraries can employ 1 or more composers or songwriters as employees, keeping them busy with in-house projects. But animation scoring teams are the most popular “team” approach we see in film and television work. Usually the team is headed by a composer of fairly major note, and employs “junior” composers as needed to supply music for one or more animated television series. The work can be very busy and very educational, and is often a great way to hone your composing skills. However, it can also be a test of your attitude and ambition. If you want to become well known as a composer, you may not get there very fast since your name will likely never make it to the screen. You should, however, be given some cue sheet credit for your composing work, but policies for this vary from one team to another. In the best scenario, you learn from the “master” composer and the education of being on the team, having to write lots of music fast, and having regular work that you don't have to go out and compete for can be a priceless educational process. Usually, once a team composer achieves a certain degree of success and skill, he will venture out on his own, creating a new opening on the team for a junior composer. In principal, this is a great system that harkens back to the old “studio system” of composers and apprentice composers all on staff learning on-the-job.

The downside of composing teams is that you must often write in the style of the master composer, must be comfortable with that person getting screen credit for all the music of the show, and must play “by the rules” of the composing team which can often mean not letting the client (the show's producer, director, etc.) know of your presence, much less your role in writing the music. While not all composing teams operate with this kind of “hidden” manner, many do, and having to pretend not to have any official role in music you've just poured your heart and soul into can be a very frustrating experience.

The bottom line on composing teams: Many composing teams are excellent educational experiences that can create relationships between composers that can have benefits throughout your career. However, if you're considering joining one of these teams, make sure you know the “rules” up front, and make sure you can live by them without frustration or conflict – those emotions hardly help the creative process. In all cases, avoid creating a bad relationship with the team leader, because if you're perceived as having wronged that composer or songwriter, the negative effect on your reputation can last for a long time.

The Positive Collaboration

What we've termed a "positive collaboration" involves 2 or more creative people working together in a mutually agreeable and mutually beneficial manner. In this type of relationship, each party benefits handsomely (or at least equally!) and there is no exploitation by or of anyone on the team. Many songwriter/lyricist relationships fall into this category, and it's a co-writing situation that can have wonderful results for the team. Even though there may be one member of the team or partnership that is dominant in some way(s), the other team members are free to assert their own skills, feelings, and creative input, and in the end everybody shares in the success in an atmosphere of mutual respect and cooperation. These sound like lofty, altruistic words, but these situations actually do exist – and it's the fortunate creatives who are part of these teams. If you find yourself in a collaboration, do whatever you can to make it mutually respectful, mutually beneficial, and mutually rewarding. Avoid exploitation, and avoid the dominance of any one member to the exclusion or detriment of the other members. Do everything you can to keep things fair and equitable, and make sure everyone on the team is OK with decisions – especially those involving money, credit, and any other business contract points such as publishing, etc. If a team member seems to be straying from the team, communicate with him and find out why. If there's a problem that can be fixed and the straying team member wants to stay on the team, find a way to fix the problem. If the member is naturally straying towards a course of independence, this is OK too... preserve the relationship and make the split an amicable one. One way or another, keep the relationship in place whether that person stays on the team or not, and you'll have an asset that can serve you well down the road.

The Negative Collaboration

Negative collaborations are a dime a dozen in Hollywood today, and are a big contributor to the high amount of fallout and frustration that our industry is dealing with these days. Avoid negative collaborations at any cost, because even if things might seem good in the beginning, there is usually one common result of these dysfunctional working relationships: bitterness, regret, and damaged reputations.

Negative collaborations usually consist of a 2-person situation where there is one "sales" or business oriented member who may be good at finding work, and one or more "creative" members of the collaboration who have the talent to actually do the work. If the relationship were constructed correctly, these two people should be a manager and client, or agent and client, but in negative collaborations, the "sales" member insists that he is "creative too" and wants to be seen as a co-writer or co-composer in the industry when in reality he lacks the talent and skills to create. Another word for the creative member of this kind of collaboration is *ghostwriter*, a term that you should avoid at all costs being applied to you. While ghostwriting was once an accepted way "into" the business, the last thing you want to be in today's highly competitive industry is somebody's dirty little secret that nobody can know about.

The main problem with these types of negative collaborations is that the "sales" person often insists that the "creative" person do and say things that will make their clients think that

both of the collaborators are “creating” the music. The best possible situation here can be that the “creative” person decides he can live with this sham because he doesn’t want to “sell” and it’s an acceptable price to pay to make the “sales” guy look like a co-writer. But the far more common situation is that the “sales” person fools himself into thinking he’s actually got the talent to write, and the “creative” person gets extremely frustrated and bitter at this non-writer taking credit for the creative’s actual work, and things deteriorate from there. An amazing amount of resentment, bitterness, and even hatred can result from these exploitative situations, and Hollywood is littered with the corpses of these type of relationships – composers and songwriters who, at the mere mention of one of these “sales” people’s names, will dive into emotional negativity and plunge into a rant about the despicable nature of these people and how many people they’ve “used and abused,” including of course, the person doing the ranting.

Negative collaborations are awful situations you would do well to avoid completely, at all costs. Many of the “sales” types go from one creative to another, creating these negative collaborations and exploiting each creative person until they get frustrated and quit, or discover the case history of the “sales” person and wise up. The fact that some of these “sales” types can work themselves up into executive positions in film and television production companies should be reason enough to avoid becoming part of the fallout from one of these relationships – the last thing you need is an enemy in the executive ranks of film and television music.

#8 – Get an Agent

There is a somewhat widely held belief in the film music business today that to get jobs you have to have an agent. Depending on who you talk to at what level of the business, this can be true or false. Let's examine some situations:

The Student Film – This type of project rarely pays anyway, and student (and graduate student) level filmmakers are unlikely to think less of a talented composer who doesn't have an agent. In fact, not having an agent may be a benefit as it reduces the "red tape" factor that can get in the way of the composer developing a close, personal bond with the director (that can result in future, hopefully better-paying work!).

Low Budget Films and Low Budget Documentary Projects – These types of projects are usually either direct-to-video films made by production companies that specialize in this sort of project, or independent films made by independent filmmakers with a "vision" for the film. While having an agent may be beneficial for some of these projects, many projects hire composers directly without asking for or desiring the services of an agent. The reason for this is simple: many of these projects are looking to hire composers at the least possible cost, and cutting out the middleman (the agent) is one way of trying to keep the composer's fee as low as possible.

The TV Movie of the Week – These are usually made by established production companies where an agent is a real benefit. The prestige of being represented by a "name" agent can make a big difference for these projects, since you may well be competing with one of the industry's top composers for these jobs depending, of course, on the particulars of the job.

Studio Feature Films, Network TV Series – Having an agent is a huge advantage in these types of projects where the decision makers are often high-level producers or directors. The projects are well-funded, and aren't ready to take a chance on any "unproven" talent. For better or for worse, "unproven" and "don't have an agent" are synonymous to many of these decision makers.

Depending on the type of projects you are working on or want to work on, having an agent can be a huge plus. Also, it can mean the difference in whether you are seriously considered for a project or not.

Getting an agent involves approaching the agent with the intention of building a relationship. Agents have dozens of composers contacting them every day wanting representation, and there aren't nearly enough agents to represent all the composers and songwriters out there. The bottom line: getting an agent is a tough job, and one that should be approached very carefully. Use the relationship approach we've discussed in previous sections of this guide, and always be looking for ways to be a solution to the *agent's* needs, not ways for them to be a solution to your needs.

For a much more detailed look at the process of getting an agent, consider *Film and Television Music Agents: A Strategic Guide and Directory*, available online from the Film Music Store at www.filmmusicstore.com.

#9 – Music Libraries

A music library generally works by hiring composers and songwriters to write music to their specifications, then marketing that music in an effort to get it placed in as many different places as possible. Since the libraries own the music they commission, they're free to make whatever type of licensing deals they want to, and with libraries today owning hundreds of hours of music, a library can bring a huge amount of music to the bargaining table.

Skillful music libraries will get "in" on film and television projects by finding ways to be included on the temp track (see Section #3 – Music Editors for more on this) and will develop positive relationships with music editors, music supervisors and film companies as the ultimate quick solution to music needs. Since their music is "ready to go" and already produced, mixed and mastered, music libraries can provide quick solutions to a variety of musical needs ranging from the sudden need to replace a song that the film company couldn't get favorable terms from the publisher and/or record company on, to source music that's needed because the filmmaker forgot that he needed music to be playing in a barroom or restaurant. Many libraries have full-time, experienced sales teams that spend many hours each day calling filmmakers, music supervisors, and production companies making sure their libraries are in-place and ready when music needs arise.

A somewhat new phenomenon is the popularity of the *score library* – a library designed to have different elements that can be edited together to create a custom score. These libraries are carefully designed to make each piece of music matchable with many others, and the quality of the music in these libraries and libraries in general is increasing quickly.

As music libraries achieve more and more success in the film and television music business, they need more and more fresh material. Great sounding, fresh material is the main asset of most libraries, and one way to get your music into film and television is to become a writer for these libraries. One of the big advantages of writing for the libraries is that many times it doesn't matter where you live – the libraries are interested in your music and writing ability, not whether or not you are handy for meetings and schmoozing.

Here's an approach that you may want to use:

1. Compile a list of libraries and create a demo CD for each. If the library has particular specialties or strengths, you may want to create a customized CD tailored to the profile of each library. Otherwise, create a great general demo CD and put your very best stuff on it.
2. Contact the libraries and ask who handles composer and writer relations. Ask for the opportunity to send your material – usually you'll get a "yes" on this if you make your pitch professionally and sound like you're an experienced, low-maintenance type of person. Writing for a library is a "taking care of business" proposition – and is not for the big egos. Check your ego at the door and adopt a businesslike attitude for the libraries, and it will go far. Your job with the library will be about filling a particular need they decide they have, and what you think sounds good may not be high on their priorities.

3. If the relationships permits, find out if there are any particular types of music that the library specializes in currently or is looking for now. Tailor your demo and materials accordingly.
4. Schedule your library contacts for regular follow-ups, but keep everything businesslike. Avoid ego oriented behavior at all costs – remember that you're filling a business need with these folks. Depending on the personalities that you're dealing with at each library, you might even want to skip sending the usual "announcement" postcards that broadcast your finished projects, etc. In some cases it may be better to send new demo CDs quarterly to your library prospects that contain a sampling of the best new music you've written and recorded.
5. If you get interest (or even better, strong interest) from a library, you'll need to get to know the terms and business policies of that library in order to move forward with discussions. Many libraries will avoid hiring writers if they write for competitive libraries, and your time and availability to write "on demand" when the library needs new music can make a difference. The best policy usually is to get the library's policy (it's almost always unwritten) and business practices into the discussion once they've expressed an interest in your music. Make sure you can live with the policies, and don't overlook possible conflicts such as publishing deals that you're already involved in that would affect your library writing.
6. When it's time to make a deal with a library, note that there are generally three ways to make money from library deals – initial composing fees, receiving a share of the "sync" fees that some libraries charge on a per-use basis to clients who want to use specific music, receiving a share of the sales revenue from the music library CDs that are sold outright to clients, and performing rights royalties paid through the performing rights societies to you (the writer) and the library (the publisher) when the music is broadcast. Each library will make one or more of these available to you depending on the type of deal you strike with the library and the library's policies and procedures. If you're unfamiliar with standards and practices in the music library business, consider joining one of the online forums that discuss these issues (Film Music Publications offers the Film Music Forum (an online forum) and the Film Music Pro email discussion list – see **www.filmmusiconline.com** for more information) and become informed. To increase your chances for success, become informed before you find yourself discussing a deal, not during or after the deal is made.

Another interesting fact about music libraries is that they sometimes "buy" existing, unused music from composers and songwriters such as unused cues written for productions. You may want to check your contracts to see if unused cues become the property of the film or television project's production company or not. If they remain your property, consider what a music library might be able to do to help that music earn some revenue.

Music libraries, once thought of as cheesy and "canned," are making big inroads into film and television music. Don't make the mistake of writing these folks off as a second-rate alternative to "custom" music...

#10 – Being in the right place at the right time

One of the things that confounds newcomers to the film and television music industry is the myriad of different and bizarre ways that people can get jobs writing music for film and television. While we've discussed many of the most effective ways, there is an entire other category of job hunting skills that can't be reduced down to a list, guide, or document...

While you might initially think the title of this section refers to luck, and luck certainly is a wonderful asset to have, what we're talking about here is doing things and taking steps that can put you in the right place, hopefully at the right time. Here are some examples of ways you can increase the odds in the composer and songwriter hiring game:

1. Use word of mouth to get the word out that you're hard-working, dependable, and can be trusted to do a great job writing music. Especially in LA, your reputation can make or break your chances of success – protect it and guard against gossip and rumors. Make friends, be social, and network with your peers and especially with those who could play a role in recommending or hiring you such as music supervisors and filmmakers.
2. Stay on top of production schedules that are published in the trade papers and know who's doing what in town. Beyond the fact that this will supply you with a constant supply of conversation-starters during social events and phone calls, it will help you spot opportunities in the industry.
3. Don't wait for the phone to ring – go out and get the work you want. The more competitive the environment, the more proactive successful business people have to be. Composing and songwriting is no exception to this rule, and every composer from the top on down spends lots and lots of time on the phone.
4. Carefully manage your relationships with more experienced composers and songwriters. These can be tricky, because you may find yourself asking advice from a composer one day, and competing with him for a film the next. Such are the hazards of today's competitive environment, so be aware of this and manage your relationships in a businesslike manner.
5. Be aware of industry and technology trends. Don't fall into the trap of some of the die-hard "old-school" composers who spend their time complaining that things aren't the way they used to be 20 years ago – that's about as productive as trying to drive down the freeway looking out the rear view mirror! Look to the future, and find ways to make industry trends and evolution work for you. Embrace technology – it's a fact of life now, and look for ways that technology can help you provide a better product for your clients. The more of a resource you can be for your clients, the more you bring to the job, and the greater your value on the team.

APPENDIX A – SOURCES OF PRODUCTION INFORMATION

There are several good sources of production information that can be used to locate film and television projects in various phases of development. The following sources have proven to be helpful to composers and songwriters who are on the lookout for opportunities to submit for projects:

The Hollywood Reporter (daily edition)

Daily Variety

These trade publications carry announcements about approved projects at studios and news stories about productions in progress. They also include production listings including contact information.

The Music Report

Attn: Adam W. Wolf

1120 S. Robertson Blvd.

Los Angeles, CA 90035

Tel (310) 276-9166

www.breakdownservices.com

The Music Report features listings by film and television production companies for music that is needed. The Report is available to publishers and other industry pros, and includes both songs, score, and live music requests.

In Hollywood

www.inhollywood.com

In Hollywood is one of the best online production information services available, and carries extensive listings about films and television shows in production.

Production Weekly

PO Box 10101

Burbank, CA 91510-0101

Tel (818) 951-0298

Fax (818) 951-0248

www.productionweekly.com

Production Weekly produces an excellent weekly report of film and television projects in production. The service is available via fax or email.

Backstage West

www.backstagewest.com

Backstage West, a weekly trade magazine, provides composer job notices for student and independent films.

CONCLUSION

There are many ways to get your music into film and television productions, and it will likely take a lot of time and effort for you to determine which ways are most suitable for you and your music. Don't be afraid to try different ways, and always be on the lookout for ways you can fine tune your marketing strategy based on the feedback and experiences you get along the way.

Your persistence can pay off if you keep at it and don't get discouraged, and always remember that this is the music *business*. Don't take rejection personally – just think of it as getting you one step closer to the person who says, “Yes, I love your music. Let's talk.”

Good luck to you on all of your projects.